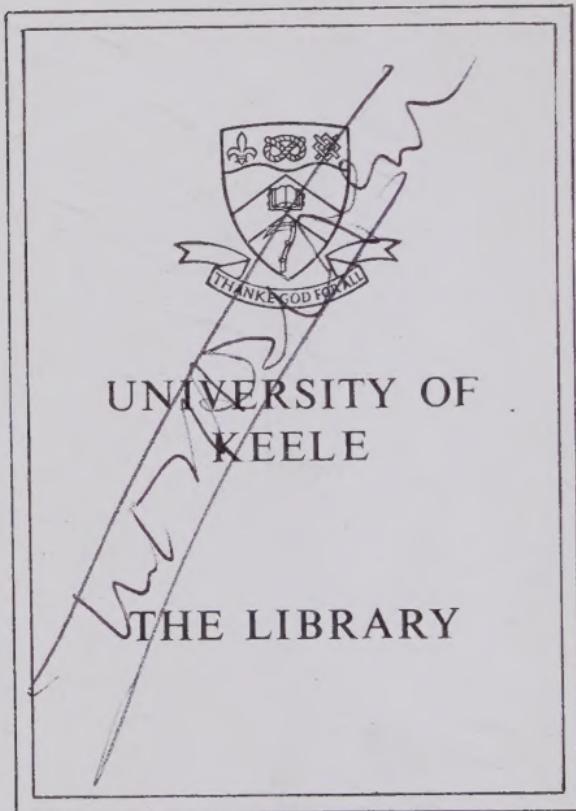


THE THREE MARYS

FREDERICK NIVEN

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THE THREE MARYS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A TALE THAT IS TOLD
ELLEN ADAIR
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
Etc.

THE THREE MARYS

by

FREDERICK NIVEN



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CHAPTER I

ROBERT BARCLAY stood on the dank deck of the steamer listening and staring with big brown eyes that had trouble and wonder in them. Listening comes first because there was more to listen to than to see. There being only one thing to look at, namely, the coiling fog, it was almost, eventually, as though there were nothing to look at and that this steamer had slowed down because it drew near the end of all things.

Far off in Serena—Peruvian Serena—many times he had heard exiles from this land (if there was a land ahead) affirm that its hills were purple and that streams of silver coursed down them. The Firth of Clyde, he had been told, was a glittering blue, and a high knob of rock called Ailsa Craig stood up majestically in the midst of that blue. So the Scots engineers of the P.S.N.C. boats who had visited his people at times, so also a Scots doctor of Serena, and so even his mother and father had said. And the chief steward, who had the little boy in charge, had just told him that this was the Firth of Clyde they were in.

He heard a passenger remark to a companion that a certain sound out of the opacity was of the fog-horn on Ailsa Craig. Robert looked from one to the other and wondered. He could not understand, but he kept his own counsel and grasped shreds of troubled faith with a secret sickness round his heart that had nothing to do with sea-sickness. He had known but one day of that, long ago, off Cape Horn.

Vividly he remembered the sun and the sand of Peru as these vapours coiled and clung and drifted along the deck-house walls like steam. He swallowed and blinked, shivered a little. Slowly the steamer surged ahead ;

and with but few pauses between blasts her siren roared, making the deck tremble and his feet tingle. Melancholy lamentations came out of the void, deep moans, high quavering screams. These drew nearer, sounded close, closer, alongside, astern, faded away.

Life, too soon, had asked almost too much of Robert Barclay. His mother, lying in bed in Serena, had talked long to him one day, telling him that it was her wish that he should go home. But Serena was home he had replied. Oh, no ; Scotland was home. He would go to school there, she said. She had already made arrangements through the consul. But couldn't he wait till she was better and till father came back from the hospital ? he had asked. No, no ; no, no. He must go now—that's how he could help her ; it would make her feel better to know that he was on his way home. Their good friend the consul . . . she went over it all again and again, with a seriousness in her eyes that he had never known before. The look in them had been compelling. All was arranged for him. People would be good to him, please God, and he would be brave.

" But why must I go ? " he had asked.

" For the best."

He bit his lip, standing on that dank deck, recalling the day that he left her. Manuelita packed his box by the bed, she weeping, but not mother. Instead, she laughed, talking about the voyage ahead of him.

" It is for the best," she said. " When you are twenty-one you will know why."

" Twenty-one ! But I'll be back from school then."

At that remark of his her eyelids had hidden her eyes from him.

" Oh, I'm not to stay away from you till I'm twenty-one, am I ? "

Then, under her dropped eyelids, the tears came and with frail knuckles she wiped them away.

" I don't want to cry," she said. " My boy, you must be braver than your mother."

Manuelita came in then and could not speak. She nodded in response to a look from his mother and said the one word, " *Si*."

" He is waiting ? "

" *Si*," and a sniff.

A clerk from the consulate had come to take Robert away. His mother held out her arms, and as he stretched up to her she gathered him in an embrace, a last embrace.

" I'm sorry I cried," she said. " Don't you cry, sonny. Look. Mother is not crying now. You mustn't."

She knew that she was dying ; and her husband was in the English hospital after his second attack of delirium tremens, a policeman on guard to take him to prison when he got better of it. Once upon a time he had been what is called a man of consequence. " Poor Barclay ! Whisky mastered him," old friends would say. Serena is a bad place even for one attack of delirium tremens. She had clung to that man during life, but on her death-bed she could not leave the boy to him. Her happiness at the end was that, taking hold on initiative, fronting the unknown, she acted for the best for Robert. There was a school in Glasgow where, poor though they were, he would be educated as she would have him educated. He would have a chance.

" Be brave. Be brave, little man. Be good till we meet again, please God."

Everybody had been very kind to him on the sailing-ship. He had voyaged on a sailing-ship round the Horn because it was cheaper than a steamer. They had made him look over the side one day, a blazing blue day when all the sailors went flapping about on the decks with bare feet, to see the equatorial line. They gave him a pair of binoculars, and as he peered overboard into the water one of them let him see the equator by the simple expedient of holding a cord near the glasses, an arm on either side of him, deflecting his attention from that stratagem by saying : " Look through carefully, now,

sonny. We must be passing over." He had seen the trick played on him, but it was as good to see as the equator ! These sailors were very far off now. The ship (barque to be precise), *Santona*, nitrate clipper, all gray-blue iron with black painted ports, had stopped at Cork. There the first mate had gone ashore with him to an office and talked to an old man across a broad shining counter ; and later he had brought him aboard this steamer, leaving him with the parting words :

" Well, so-long, old man. Be brave. You'll be all right."

If only that first mate of the *Santona* could have delivered him to the promised friends at the journey's end ! When he went (cap atilt, backward canted, with a markedly individual method of progress, as though he threw his legs before him), the last link with Serena went and with his mother in bed there, laughing and crying.

All this he thought of as the steamer surged slowly into the fog that was called the Firth of Clyde. Here truly he had to be brave. But at least he had a flying-fish in a glass case that the skipper had given him ; and he had a little ship all cut with a jack-knife that Sails had made for him, and a queer shell like a twisted trumpet from that first mate. These helped—the flying-fish, the little ship all carved out by Sails, and the shell.

At Greenock there was a great stirring of the passengers. They impressed themselves on the boy's mind, went into a box behind his eyes in which he kept pictures. The head steward told him that he would look after his trunk and big bag.

" You just sit around here, sonny," he said, pointing into the purser's office, " or stand if you like—on your head or your feet—but wait here and we'll fix you up."

He clapped his shoulder and left him. Robert noticed that the door, which was hooked back, was covered over its sheen of polish with a film of moisture. When he laid a hand on the little counter it was wet,

he found. He left the print of his fingers on it. There was a lot of water in the air.

“Come along, my son, here’s a lady for you.”

The purser had entered, and behind him was a slender woman in a cloak of the kind called dolman, and wearing a little bonnet with a knot of blue flowers in it, as though in an attempt toward gaiety. This was Mrs. Cameron, who had been a parlour-maid in the first Barclay house in Glasgow and, after several years of service there, married the baker’s van-boy, who had become, in time, a baker himself. Care and kindness were blent in her face. Her hair showed many silver threads. One wonders if, perhaps, in the plannings upon her death-bed, Mrs. Barclay, straining so hard to be practical, had forgotten that she had aged, that all age. Perhaps she pictured Mrs. Cameron as still the bright-cheeked parlour-maid, Annie MacGregor.

“Well, Bobbie, here you are.” She smiled on him, shook hands with him, half stooped as if to kiss him and then, instead, clapped his shoulder. “Your things are all ashore. Come along, my dear. Thank you, sir, for all you’ve done.”

“That’s all right, madam. Nothing at all.”

As they passed up to the deck a very jolly doctor stopped them, looked at Robert, rumpled up his hair (of a hue then near that called ginger), at the same moment peering at his forehead, then asked him if he had a long tongue or a short one, and chuckled when the boy put it out for him to make his own decision.

They went ashore to more travel. When would all this journeying away, away, away from Serena, the red-bricked patio, mother and Manuelita, be over? They got into a train that carried them out into a world in which there was no sun. He had come far from the sun. There were here no shadows anywhere, or everything was in one big shadow.

“Is this the rainy season here?” he asked Mrs. Cameron.

"The rainy season!" she ejaculated. "Oh, it rains a lot here," she said.

"Where are the purple hills and the silver streams?" he inquired.

She cudgelled her brains.

"Your mother will have told you of their summer holidays in the highlands," she said, "and of the Isle of Rathay maybe."

"Mother wanted me to come here. She said it was for the best. It's a long way to have come all alone."

Mrs. Cameron thought he was going to cry, but he did not. A sensitive little fellow he seemed to be, but sturdy. The big brown eyes showed perplexity but the little chin was strong and firm.

"It's a long way to have been brave," he told her.

Arrived through the sunless land at Glasgow, they got out of the train under a high curved roof of dusky glass, and passed out to a black drizzle in a noisy city. On the pavements a sticky substance had been spread thinly. But no one seemed afraid or troubled. Everybody marched along with an air of all being well. The unperturbed appearance of the people gave him confidence.

Pollok Street they came to in a cab that was just a little box of noise, deafening, and in the cab Mrs. Cameron did not try to talk. It was useless. The wheels skidded sometimes on that glutinous black substance that was spread everywhere, and caused her to joggle against him. Over the roofs of long, low sheds on the way he saw the funnels of steamers and then, for a stretch, the masts of ships.

"Do any of these sailing-ships come all the way from Peru?" he asked.

"Eh?" she inquired, stooping her head on one side to hear.

He repeated it. He had to shout it.

"Oh, I suppose from all over the world," she said.

From all over the world ! So he felt less lost. There were links even here with the place from which he had come.

Pollok Street was a very broad street, one of the broadest in south-side Glasgow. Those were the days before the city fathers, observing its breadth, narrowed it by taking up the stones in the middle, sowing grass, and putting railings round that grass in a valiant attempt to create another "lung" for their city. It was not a very long street, but long enough for one end of it to be as strangers' territory to the inhabitants of the other. At one extremity were flats such as the house-agents advertise as three-room and kitchen, and four-room and kitchen flats, with a few "front door houses" interspersed. At the other end were no "front door houses," and the flats were cleft into room and kitchen dwellings "suitable for respectable working men."

Mrs. Cameron's husband was a respectable working man. He arrived about half an hour after they did, and at sight of him Robert remembered hearing his mother sing "dusty was the miller, dusty was his coat." He had immediately a picture of Mr. Cameron working at a place in the country where was a big mill-wheel dropping water, and there were two or three ducks, and a man fishing. Really Mr. Cameron worked in the dim basement of a shop in Paisley Road, a few blocks away, the world of men around him all day long announced by the clip-clapping of feet on and off the grating set into the pavement before the window.

He was not only floury, flour on his cap, flour on his almost colourless beard, but tired. But he had a very kindly welcome for the little stranger.

"So this is the young Barclay," he said. "Oh, aye, aye. Yes, I see the mither's een."

The "mither's een!" The small boy's brows furrowed in puzzlement. Oh, yes, the dusty miller meant what he called *eyes*.

THE THREE MARYS

" Well, young man, ye've had a long journey. Quite a world-wanderer ye are, eh ? "

" It's been a long way. There was Serena to Cork. And then there was Cork to Greenock on a steamer instead of a ship. And then there was Greenock to Glasgow. And then there was the cab."

" Hoo much was the cab ? " the dusty miller asked his wife.

" Oh, we had to have the cab for the box and big bag ! "

" Certainly, certainly. I ken that, but I just wondered what a cab wad be frae the station to here."

She told him.

" Ah weel, that's reasonable. Weel, I'll change maself."

" How's the cough ? " she asked.

" Just as usual. A baker canna complain, I suppose."

Robert went off into a dream of a baker's shop at Serena, in the windows of which there was always a big platter heaped with little biscuits shaped like rabbits, with currants for their eyes. He was far off. He was far off during the meal, which was but of tea, bread and butter and a boiled egg, and strawberry jam to follow. He was walking again with Manuelita from the Mole toward the Plaza where was a great bronze horse on which the president sat in bronze with drawn sword, striking a Latin gesture. Behind were palm trees that looked as if made of metal also. That baker's shop : he had been afraid once, passing it, hearing a chanting din within—" Ha, ha, ha, hee ! Ha, ha, ha, hee ! " He had been scared till Manuelita told him it was only that the bakers, kneading flour and turning it over, standing in a row, worked to that chant. There was a punch into the dough at each " ha," and at " hee ! " they turned it over. Hardly would Mr. Cameron make bread to a delirious chant as of people doing something wild and heady. This was a different country.

Out of the window he saw lights being lit across the

way, and the sounds in Pollok Street were loud, raucous, strange. He was again on his magic carpet. He was far off. He was walking with his mother, in the days before she took to bed, looking at the ships and seeing her smile oddly at the ones that had not only a Union Jack flying but the Blue Peter up too.

“ Weel, laddie, how are ye feeling ? When do ye wontedly bed ? ” asked Mr. Cameron.

“ Oh ! ” said the boy, and looked from one to the other. “ I’m half asleep, ” he said.

So he was shown his bed, a queer bed in a hole in the wall of the sitting-room that adjoined the kitchen. He knelt beside it and said his prayers and then he stood up puzzled. Where, he wondered, was south ? There had been so many turnings that he could not be sure. And there had been no setting sun to tell him where was west. After his big brother went away from Serena to work at the Panama Canal for the French people there, and before word came that he had died of yellow fever, he used, after prayers at night, to blow a kiss to him—northward. He made a hazard of south by west now, and blew a kiss in that direction—good-night to them all in Serena.

As he got into bed, for the door had been left open for air, the window being shut to keep the room clean, he heard the dusty miller say :

“ Did ye notice thon ? ”

“ Ye mean when he said he was half-asleep ? ”

“ Aye. ”

“ Aye, I noticed. Half-asleep. ”

“ He’s come an awful lang way for a laddie. He’s rale brave. ”

The words were almost in a foreign tongue, for his folks, though Scots, did not speak that way. But this was good hearing—like a “ well done, good and faithful servant. ” He had seemed to be brave at least. He gulped, and a tear or two came as he lay there, but sleep came also.

CHAPTER II

ROBERT wrote a long letter to his mother to tell her that he had arrived safely and that two gentlemen had come to arrange about his education. He hoped it would not take long. He would try to be educated as quickly as possible, and he would let her know when he was educated so that she could arrange for him to go back to Serena.

This letter he wrote when Mrs. Cameron was out one day and he very lonely. When she came back he asked if he could have an envelope, there having been only a writing-pad in view on the shelf beside the twopenny ink-bottle.

"Whatever for?" she asked.

"To put this letter in for my mamma."

Her eyes closed and under the pressed lids tears came that she tried to stem.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Cameron? What's wrong?"

She sat down without removing her bonnet and drew him to her, much as his mother used to do at times; and she told him, as his mother told him, that he must be brave.

"Your mamma has gone on a long journey," she continued.

"Is she coming here?"

"No, no, my dear. Not here. You must be brave, Bobby, when I tell you that—when I tell you—"

He peered at that troubled face before him.

"Oh, what is it?" he said. "Has she gone farther than from here to Serena? Are you afraid that perhaps she won't be able to get back?" For sometimes he wondered if he would ever get back over that long route of his.

Mrs. Cameron took both his hands in her rough ones.

"You must know, Bobby," she said, "that your dear mamma is happy. It was for the best."

"For the best?" That was what his mother had told him of his coming to school here.

"She is at rest. Your mother was a very dear lady and life dealt hardly with her, and she is at rest. She is dead. Oh, don't look like that, boy. Don't look like that. Her spirit is here. Her spirit is everywhere that you are now."

She had gone away, then, as his big brother had gone to Colon—and beyond, whence there was never any returning. Here were mysteries to temper the pang that he would not see her again.

"And papa?"

"Your father has gone with—" Mrs. Cameron checked herself. "Your father has gone on his long journey too. He died in hospital shortly after you left Serena."

That, somehow, affected Robert less. His father had always been far from him, even when near.

"They are both at rest," said Mrs. Cameron. "Oh, my dear, I think this afternoon when Mr. Cameron comes home we might go out to one of the parks and perhaps listen to the band. Did you ever listen to a band?"

Yes. They had listened to the band in the Plaza at Serena. Papa was not funny that day. They all got on very well together. He bought her a fan from the man who came round selling them. Such memories were revived in his mind, but he did not answer, because when he tried to he felt that if he spoke he would cry, and he had to be brave. He did not answer, just stared at her, his brown eyes big; and, truth to tell, the resolute little chin that has been commented on was drooping then.

"Yes," he said, and no more.

Observing him she thought perhaps they had better not go to Queen's Park to listen to the band but have "a penny hurl" on a tramcar instead. She heaved a sigh. She muttered: "Aye, it's an awful curse, the

drink. It can be an awful curse. And to think of what he might have been. He had his own business, ye ken. I think, Bobby," she said, " ye had better call me auntie now. Your mother was gentry, and yet she was just like a sister to me, different from the way the would-be gentry behave. I think it would please her for you to call us aunt and uncle."

One hesitates to call Mrs. Cameron a snob just because she was averse to turning her charge loose in the street to play with the other children there. Such was the usage in Pollok Street, especially that end of it —to give a child a "jeely piece," a slice of bread and jam, or of bread with butter on it and a sifting of sugar, and despatch it out of door, as into a public nursery. So Robert's life in Glasgow began with looking through a window at children playing, he aloof from them.

There were a few books in that sitting-room that was never used, that he only walked into at night to get into the bed in the hole in the wall. He opened them and looked at the pictures, and the worlds inside them became real worlds to him. When he was tired of that he would look out of the window. He watched the coalmen going past slowly by their carts, peering up at windows and calling "O-O!" which meant "Coal!" They would stop and carry a sack off on their backs and return with it empty to lay atop the other empty ones. So he used a chair for a horse and old paper bags for coal-sacks. He delivered coal to the four quarters of the room and into the box-bed, folded up the empty bags, and pointed up at the pictures which were as windows. But he did not shout "O-O!" He whispered it, for he had learnt to play quietly in Serena. Then he would go back to the window and watch the children play, and wish he could feel the warm sun of Serena, school over and he back there. *Tick-tock, tick-tock* went the clock on the mantelpiece in the sealed quiet of the room.

Their summer holidays were but a week at Rothesay, the return fare being reasonable, very reasonable. There the dusty miller was a new man. He got out his old straw hat that had already served through five summer holidays and summer Sundays, and cleaned it with a preparation that he bought for a penny from a kerb-hawker in Argyle Street, and nobody, he happily deluded himself, would know but it was a new hat. He took them out in a boat every day, and though the fact that there was a precarious financial side to life had not by then assailed Robert's consciousness there was, one day, an inkling for him regarding his own finances.

Mrs. Cameron halted on the esplanade and addressed her husband. Her heart was not impoverished, but acquaintance with penury gave her pause.

"Can we afford it?" she asked. "Can we afford a boat every day?"

"Oh, it's a verra reasonable chairge here."

"I'll tell you," said she. "Let Robert stand it to-day out of the allowance. I'm sure his mother would wish it."

"Never heed that," said Mr. Cameron.

"Say 'never mind.'"

"Eh?"

"Never mind, not 'never heed.' Think of the boy. His mother and faither spoke gentry."

Cameron made a sound of disgust or contempt, but the spirit that prompted that snort was not an outstanding one.

"Aye," he said, "that's right. There's no saying what he may come to. Attending a good school till he's in the sixth standard, and then maybe winning a scholarship or bursary to take him to the eighth and another to the tenth. And then a scholarship, if he's fit, to the university. Oh, never heed about him standing to-day's boat-ride. The puir laddie. It isna verra much he has, and it has tae last a lang while.

She was the best mistress ye ever had. Ye was more like sisters with each other than mistress and servant." He stopped and coughed violently. " Damn the bakery business," he said, " wi' the flour fleeing into the lungs."

" Oh, dinna sweir before the laddie ! " she exclaimed, lapsing herself.

" I tell you what," said Mr. Cameron, inspired. " We'll get tackle and bait from the boatman and fish a flounder for supper. That will save us buying, and even it up ! "

Rothesay did not feel as far away from Serena as Glasgow somehow, perhaps not only because it was not sooty and by reason of spaces there, but because of a band often in the bandstand and a feeling of gaiety in the crowds. Also the sun shone every day. Now and then they turned away inland from the sea past a region to rear of the front street that had qualities in it reminiscent of Serena. In the evenings they sat by an open window looking out till light failed and lamps had to be lit within. The newspaper for tablecloth always interested Robert if it had pictures on it.

One night he took up a pencil and began to copy one of them on a sheet of paper.

" Eh, laddie ! Trying to draw ? " said Mr. Cameron. " Oh, dinna stop. It's a grand hobby, even if a body canna hope to approach Harrison Weir or Doré."

" Who was Doré, uncle ? "

" Doré ! Ye must ken his name. He was the greatest artist, I suppose, that ever lived. That's the way I say ye'll never of course hope to draw like him, but it's a grand hobby. A Frenchman. A lot of foreigners have been famous penters. There was Michael Angelo, now. I don't quite understand about his name. Michael ye would say was Irish. But it's the Angelo ye go by. He was an Italian. I aye think of ice-cream and hot peas and vinegar when I say Italian." He laughed pleasantly. " Ma brither was a penter. Ye ken those hands

they pent sometimes on signs, with a finger pointing ? I've heard one or two say that no sign-penter in Glasgow could do a pointing hand better. And hands are difficult to draw, I was reading the other day in an interview with an artist. Ye can tell an artist by his skill in drawing hands, it said. It reminded me of my brother."

Mrs. Cameron, listening, looked troubled. She was devoted to her husband but not blindly infatuated. She felt there was something amiss in that exposition, though she could not tell what, and wished that they had both been better educated, so that they might be more fitted to instil knowledge into the mind of this boy, whose mother had been her mistress, but also her best friend over many years.

" His mother's father painted some very pretty pictures," she remarked.

" Oh, aye, I daresay, but that would be only as a hobby," said Mr. Cameron.

" Yes, yes, just as a hobby, I think," replied Mrs. Cameron.

CHAPTER III

A MOTHER who had passed out of the world, who was a spirit in no special place but everywhere as aunt Cameron explained that mystery, had planned for Robert to go to Carruthers' Academy. She had planned for the best, things being as they were, but Carruthers' Academy was actually a bitter seminary.

A cruel place, that school. Its rector was a tyrant. To the boys who read penny dreadfuls of Captain Kidd he was Captain Kidd come from killing on the high seas to terrorise youth. He did not practise Kidd's method of shocking by chewing broken glass till he poured blood, but he would pluck the hairs out of his beard while rating some boy—probably for nothing. Even those teachers on the staff who were naturally

humane used, when he made his tours of inspection, to adopt an air of terrorism that they might retain their posts. Those others who had a turn for it could vent it then with impunity. The original Carruthers who founded the Academy would have been horrified had he seen the place. In course of time it became a public scandal. Parents removed their sons from an educational establishment in which Saint Vitus's dance was common, simply through over-flogging. Saint Vitus's dance—or stubbornness for life: that was one of the choices the Academy offered boys.

By the time Robert reached the fifth standard—the choice thereafter of education on the Classical or the Modern side to be stated by parents or guardians—he was plotting to be a stowaway, to get away, somewhere abroad, Peru if possible. There was at least the consul there, and the doctor, and there were the officers of the P.S.N.C. Often he would go down to the docks by Clydeside with other boys to investigate possibilities of stowing away. But the docks were sufficient palliative. If one did not get in the way of stevedores, if one stood aside to let them come dashing down a gangway with their trucks, instead of jumping over its end just in front of them, all was well. The turning of a swing bridge to let some vessel surge deliberately out of a dock into the river he could watch from first to last. That was an occasion. Now and then in some little side pen of imprisoned water he would come on a barque, even a barque with black painted ports like the *Santona*, and stand a long time staring at its contours, dreaming of long blue waves swinging in and out of each other with a crack of foam at the meeting. Queer to see these ships lying there so still in the flat spaces of smelly water dotted with bottle corks, with apples, with water-logged onions, as if all were split in half and laid on a dingy mirror. The tall warehouses, that had cobwebbed windows and high, terrible doors in them, he would look at also, staring, staring.

That was a happy day on which, when a Spanish sailor asked him a direction in halting English, he answered in Spanish. The sailor embraced him, and then apologised to the young señor for doing so, but it was unexpected, he explained, to hear his language here. There followed account of how Robert spoke Spanish—Serena, Peru—and the sailor marched on gaily one way and the boy, gaily, the other.

That evening, while Mr. Cameron read the paper and Mrs. Cameron darned socks, the cat coiled in her lap, Robert sat at the end of the kitchen-table drawing that sailor. Mr. Cameron, glancing at him to see what he was about, leant back and looked at the sketches over a shoulder, then turned to his *Evening News* again. After all it was an employ that kept the boy out of mischief, and the cost of the paper was worth that.

The Camerons thought it a great shame that, because of his father's ways in Glasgow before he left there to begin afresh on another canter downhill, no old family friends came to inquire how the boy fared. But that, on second thoughts, might be due to the fact that his mother had not sent them any message regarding her intentions for the boy. After all, the only remaining friends, Mrs. Cameron had a shrewd surmise, were all old creditors of Robert's father. For in those last years in Glasgow Mr. Barclay had incurred heavy debts—wherever he could borrow. An unembarrassed fresh start for her son may have been the mother's aim. She may even have thought that the old friends would be chary of Robert, watch him for evidence of inherited peccadilloes, and she may have wished to avoid for him any such mortification. Whatever the cause, there it was : in the city of his father the boy had to make his own way apart from the educational aid of Carruthers' Academy.

Years afterwards he was to recall a shopping expedition made with Mrs. Cameron to buy a suit of clothes. The question of ways and means had not

entered into his young life. All he knew was that his mother had made arrangements with the Camerons. But a sleeve, darned at elbow and darned at wrist, troubled these foster-parents. One night, the beginning of another rent showing at a threadbare spot, they discussed the sartorial problem, partly in cryptic glances and unfinished sentences.

On the Saturday following that discussion he accompanied Mrs. Cameron to the outfitters. Before entering they scrutinised the window displays. Wax boys held out their arms in entreaty, in tweeds with little belts, in "special smart suits" with Eton collars, in knicker-bockers. Her lips puckering, Mrs. Cameron regarded them.

Entering the shop after that preliminary consideration they were met by a very stylishly attired gentleman, who bowed to Mrs. Cameron as though she were the queen, and asked what he could do for her.

"Boy's suit? Certainly, madam. Walk this way, madam. Walk this way, young man."

Robert, watching him as he strutted ahead of them, grinned. The "walk this way" did it. It was a funny walk. He felt an impulse almost incontrollable to attempt to walk that way. There seemed to be something giggly in buying a suit. The gentleman, turning suddenly and throwing himself back from the waist, Robert was sure, saw him grinning. At once he was utterly sober. The gentleman gave him an oblique and cold glance down his nose as he laid a hand on the top of a pile of suits on a counter.

"Forward, Mr. Murray!" he intoned. "Boy's suit."

"Yes, sir. Yes, madam. Boy's suit," chanted Mr. Murray, hastening toward them. "Now what kind of a suit? School suit?"

"Well, I'd like one that could be worn for best and yet strong enough to do for a school suit afterwards. Er—I'd like a suit that—"

"I understand, madam."

He pressed his hands together and looked at the effigies of boys round him as though in some kind of prayer to them. Then he pointed to one.

"Something like this," he suggested. "Now, there is a smart suit. Lasting. It would look splendid on the young man at a party, and wears well. Wears well. You could get a lot of wear out of that after its party days are numbered."

He went to a stack of suits and considered them carefully.

"We want to get just the right thing," he explained, turning about then and raising toward her the palm of a hand as in sign that not the first thing that came along would do, and that he had perfect understanding of the situation. Then with an adroit flick, having with his practised eye seen a suit peeping through that might be just the right thing, he knocked up those above it and tugged it neatly out of the stack.

"There!" He laid it triumphantly on a counter. He caressed its coarse nap. "That can be worn with a collar outside, an Eton collar." He clapped his hands together, like the first clap of applause. "Eton collar outside very nice at a party. Smart. Little gentleman."

"Yes, I rather like that," said Mrs. Cameron.

"My own boys wear these suits," Mr. Murray told her.

She looked sidelong at him. She wondered.

"Oh, here we are!" he said suddenly as in a new inspiration, not inquiring of himself what that sidelong and meditative look implied, aware only that the trade was not clinched. "The Very Thing."

He marched over to one of the tall presses with sliding panels, examined the ends of some suits lying there, and returned with the Very Thing. He laid it on the counter. Then he saw a crowd gathering on the pavement opposite. He craned up to discover what caused it.

"Smart. Serviceable," he continued, absently. It

looked as if some one had fainted over there. "Wonderful value for ready-made." He craned again to see what caused the crowd. "Looks like a made-to-measure, and hardly any one could tell it was not."

Mrs. Cameron sighed.

"Defy any one to tell it wasn't!" he declared.

"I'm afraid I'm giving you a lot of trouble," said she.

"Not in the slightest. A pleasure, I assure you. Let us look round. Walk round and look for yourself."

He bowed and waved a hand to all the imploring boys with blue china eyes, and to the stacks of suits. So she walked round; the fingers of one hand fumbling on the little purse she held in it, and of the other going to her mouth and puckering the flesh below her lip. Robert was staring at her, not looking at the clothes, staring at her unconscious of what he did. She too, as the skipper who gave him the flying-fish, the mate, and Sails, was in the box of memories behind his eyes, for ever.

Mrs. Cameron returned to the suit that Mr. Murray had first selected. He did know his business.

"Ah, madam, I was right, was I not?"

She stood looking at it. An Eton collar. Eton collars cost money. Well, perhaps for parties he could have a real one, a linen one, starched; and for other days . . .

It was as if Mr. Murray read her thoughts.

"You don't always need a linen collar," he said. "You can have a linen collar for feast days, high days, and—no, not holidays. Holidays you wear out the old things, eh, sonny? But at school he could have a rubber collar. Hardly tell the difference. Smart. Serviceable. Defy any one to tell the difference."

Robert considered that an Eton collar of any sort would make him a conspicuous mark for the resentment of boys who already found the Carruthers' pupils too well dressed. Mrs. Cameron was recalling that rubber collars were not for the better classes. She put a hand to her cheek as if she had toothache. She was not a

snob, but she knew how people looked at these things. How unevenly money was distributed in this world ! She dropped her hand, these ruminations over.

“ After all,” said Mr. Murray, “ it’s not the clothes. It is the wearer. There is a saying, ‘ You can never tell a man from the rags he has on.’ But I doubt it. Little gentleman. He could wear anything—and look it.”

“ Do you like that suit, Bobby ? ” asked Mrs. Cameron.

“ Yes, but I like the second one we saw—the one without an Eton collar,” said Robert, for his own reasons.

“ I do too,” she agreed, for hers.

Buying suits, paying bills, making ends meet : the day would come when, vexed with these problems on a larger scale, out of the past he would recall that picture of Mrs. Cameron fumbling with her purse, fingering her chin.

CHAPTER IV

CARRUTHERS’ ACADEMY never knew such a thing as an Old Boys’ Club. No reunion of scholars was ever held within its forbidding walls. Boys shook the dust of it from their feet when they left. The passing of youth was occasion for rejoicing.

“ It’s all wrong,” said one of the humane masters, Grant by name (Wee Grant the boys called him), master of English, though equally well-fitted to be master of Latin and Greek on the Classical side, or of German and French on the Modern, and a great player of football and cricket. “ It’s all wrong,” he announced again—this in a group of his fellow-teachers during a recess—“ that boys of twelve, thirteen, fourteen, should look upon the flight of time with elation, feel ecstasy at its passing. It is a common argument of those who

do not believe in a survival of human personality after bodily death, and desirous to proselytise others to their view, to state that belief in immortality has only grown out of men's hope for it—the wish father to the thought. Well, millions in China pray for no transmigration (their substitute for life in a heavenly land), only for annihilation, not willing to take a chance on any more lives on this earth." He hit the arms of his chair with the palms of his hands. " What are we doing with these boys ? We are making them—from seven to twelve, thirteen, fourteen—like that. For God's sake, they pray, let it be got over, let us come to *it is finished*."

What Wee Grant said was true, but who was he among so many ? Robert looked forward to the day when he would pass under the wrought-iron gates for the last time and, as for epitaph on his youth, murmur : " Well, that's that." The last quarter of the sixth standard was to him as the last quarter of the last year of a long incarceration to a convict.

It was then, when he was in standard six, that the Camerons had a talk with him about his future, and acquainted him with his financial state. The money left by his mother was rapidly diminishing, and there was only sufficient left to pay his school fees and keep him for another year. Of course if he won a two years' bursary he could stay on.

" What would ye like to be if ye don't win a bursary or scholarship and can't go on at the Academy ? " Mr. Cameron asked him.

" A sheep-farmer," he answered immediately.

" A sheep-farmer ! Bless the lad. Where did ye get that idea ? "

Where indeed ? During tramps on Saturdays with one or two of his friends out on the Kilmarnock road, and by field-paths to Ballygeogh (under the shadow of which, by the way, a long poem generally considered very dry, and called *The Course of Time* had been written by one called Pollok—the same name as that

of the street in which Robert lived), and back by Eaglesham, he had seen the sheep scattered up and down the humps of grass. Also in Renfield Street he had seen a picture of sheep on the long purple rolls of a moor, which had made a great impression on him ; there were little pools of peaty water in the picture and in their blackness, most magically, were bits of reflected sky. A sheep farm ?

The picture had, no doubt, been every whit as appealing as the moors out Mearns and Eaglesham way where the sheep strung past among heather and dipped away in files down the slopes of high grass-tufted hillocks. But he did not mention it. He had become aware of certain glances of Mrs. Cameron turned upon him during evenings at home when he sat engrossed over " trying to draw." There had been hints that she thought he was too old for such childish amusement, hints kindly enough. Besides—paper was spoiled, wasted.

They were good to him, both of them. They hoped for great things for him, comfort in his distant old age. Mr. Cameron had even talked to a friend of his, in one of the big railway offices, about their ward, and discovered that he could enter the office at fourteen years of age, receive a pound a month for the first year, by the second be earning thirty shillings a week, by the tenth two pounds a week and, at sixty, retire on a pension. And a pension was attractive to both Mr. and Mrs. Cameron. A pension would be wonderful to look forward to. Here was he, for example, working on and on. His wife required new spectacles and they had to save for that ; his teeth were going one by one, but he could not afford a false set. As soon as they had saved a few extra pennies there was some unexpected call on them. It was good to look to the future.

" A sheep-farmer ! " repeated Mr. Cameron and, chin on chest, stared before him. " Well, it would be an open-air life. Much is to be said for that. Look at me

with the baking business. You get the flour in your lungs. It might be arranged, laddie, it might be arranged." He was thinking of some distant relations of his in the Isle of Rathay. "Weel, we'll see."

The subject was left in abeyance, was seemingly dismissed, though it privately remained in their minds. The little boy who had come to them from Serena had been sturdy, with a way of standing with taut legs, head raised, accentuating the definite effect of his firm young chin. The growing youth was less markedly robust physically. In his second winter in Glasgow a change had been manifest. After the youthful maladies of chickenpox, scarlet fever, and mumps, he had not "pulled round" as they'd have wished. The doctor said he had kept enough warmth from Peru to tide him through the first winter but that he was an organism transplanted, this not his climate, this not his air. ("We feed him the best we can," Mrs. Cameron had sadly remarked.) An open-air life, life on a sheep-farm, might bring back that appearance of bodily hardihood that in the growing years, and the bullied and intimidated years at Carruthers' Academy, had somewhat dwindled. So though Mr. and Mrs. Cameron did not continue the talk it left them with, in the cliché, food for thought.

The sixth session came; its last term wore on. The teachers had by then discovered the boys who might procure, for proof of their competence, the requisite marks, coached them assiduously and flogged the remainder duly. Robert was neither a sheep nor a goat. He sat, usually, near the tail-end of the promising, in some subject moving up to the top, in another tumbling down as far as to the lead among the unpromising. A sorry queue that. At its far end sat the boys who had been beaten thus early in the battle of life. From stolid they had passed to stupid. Nothing could be done with them. Asked a question by a master they merely held forth a hand for the thrash of the taws.

Into their palms they rubbed resin as an aid, or supposed aid, toward diminishing the pain.

Robert was sick of the place, but it had not broken him. The firm chin, that Mrs. Cameron noticed when first she saw him, was still firm. Interesting combination—these gentle brown eyes and that stern young jaw. He could hold out till the end—but the end, he hoped, would be the sixth standard. He would not try very hard to win scholarship or bursary. A thought that his mother, who had sent him here to be educated, might wish him to continue, he thrust aside. His mother could not have known what manner of place it was. The majority of the boys left at end of their sixth standard year and so, he pondered, would he.

One day, in a fit of elation at the passage of time, freedom close, when no master in the room he drew upon the blackboard a picture of the Rector. All his loathing was in it. Abruptly into the room came Wee Grant. At once he saw the portrait, stared, stood back from it, turned and faced the class. Then he took a duster and carefully wiped out the drawing.

“Sorry to destroy so clever a thing,” said he.

The boys loved him for that, as for much else. He looked round the room again from one boy—suspect—to another, wondering.

“Whoever did that can see,” he added.

As he glanced round the class again he knew. By the light on Robert Barclay’s sensitive and self-betraying face he knew.

But the secret was safe with Wee Grant. He knew enough of the drawing classes of that seminary to realise that Robert might not be its most brilliant pupil. Drawing there meant sitting down before a sheet of paper on which, to the left side of a straight line, half of a vase had been drawn by the master and, on the blank paper to right of this line, drawing in the lacking outline in reverse. If a boy could not do it without measuring, then might he measure. All that

was not playing the game was to fold over the paper and rub a faint outline on the right side to guide one. Grant knew there was a difference between that sort of drawing and the picture he had—for the sake of the palms and the wrists of the boy who perpetrated it—wiped out.

At last the final term ended. School was over. *Requiescat in pace! It is finished. That's that!* On the next day the boys would come, after lunch, for the breaking up celebration; one or two masters on the platform would make speeches of praise of the school and progress and the ability of its principal—a miserably travesty. One of the music students would play the violin, another the piano. Then the drill master would recite, brandishing a single-stick, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* to a climax that looked so much like raving madness that the boys could not applaud, forgot to applaud, sat staring at the reciter's paroxysms with much the same expression on their faces as they might have shown watching a dog in a fit on the street and wondering if, at the end, it would run amok and bite.

“One of these days, at some break up,” Wee Grant opined, “Smith will throw a fit as climax for ‘all the world wondered.’”

After that the prizes would be given and then, at the order, they would all stand while Smith, recovered of his recitation, stood at attention holding a Union Jack as they sang with dismal draggings:

“ God save our gra-cious Queen,
Long live our no-ble Queen,
God save the Queen :
Send her vic-tor-ious,
Happy and glo-ri-ous,
Long to reign o-verus,
Gaw-awd save our Queen.”

Five times had Robert been present at these

obsequies over another year gone by. And when the classes formed on this, the day of his sixth, in the playground, he wondered why he had troubled to be there. The Rector was at the front, commander-in chief ; to one side was the liveried janitor, rigid at attention ; to the other the drill-master, rigid at attention. For perfect quiet the Rector waited. A breath-holding hush, and then he nodded to Smith.

"In order of classes!" roared the drill master. "Those to west up the west stairs, those to east up the east stairs to the great hall. Quick—march!"

The feet beat on the cement. The feet thudded up the spiral stairs. Up the west stairs tramped classes one to four ; up the east stairs, thudding down their feet, preceded by the few boys of classes seven to ten, went classes five and six. They passed from the playground like a retreating tide from the sands. At the bottom of the east stairs the janitor stood, chanting *Left—left—left* ; and on the first landing of the west stairs was Smith, listening to the thud of the feet there and, at any syncopation, or slur of beat to his practised ear, chanting, *left-right, left—left—left*. The tail-end of class one trickled into the stairs at west, the boys marking time to catch the beat, and at the beginning of the stairs opposite the last of class six.

Robert began to mark time, ready to go swinging up. The janitor passed from sight into the doorway at his side. A master who had remained with them, seeing the boys nearly all out of the playground, moved away.

"Oh, to hell with it!" said Robert and, turning he walked over to the fountain for a last drink of water out of the hanging chained iron mug and then, glancing round the void quadrangle, with the sound of the retreating feet on the stairs—*left, left, left*—he strolled away, and out into the world. Behind him the dropped iron mug, swinging at the chain's end inverted like a bell, clanged once or twice as in a tolling of the end.

There was no prize for him that year, he hazarded. If there were, they could keep it. He had won, he knew, neither bursary nor scholarship. The sense of *it is finished* was in every breath the youngster drew, outside, where thin winds of June fluttered and there was a layer of sunlight on the flagstones. The education for which he had come so long a way, from Serena, Peru, was at an end. Most of it, no doubt, was an education not in the curriculum, a saying which perhaps only Wee Grant, of all the masters there, could understand.

He filled in the time that would otherwise have been spent in the great hall strolling by the docks, travelling west, homeward, from old Glasgow bridge. In one ghostly shed he paused a long while. The fluttering pigeons had it all to themselves. Their cooings echoed from the raftered roof and added to the sense of remoteness. Carruthers' Academy was far away. The dock water, a gleaming plane on which the ships rested as though they were flat-bottomed and set on glass, dirty glass, shared that quiet.

Strange provocative odours were in the long perspectives of these sheds where trucks stood up-ended in rows, work done there. Suddenly, walking there, he wished that he could tell his mother that he had been to school—and got it over—and that he hoped he had done enough of it to please her. Wouldn't it be wonderful if one could get in touch with dead people? Perhaps we could, he thought, if we only knew how; perhaps it was quite simple. One might do it by making some sign, even just moving the hands in a certain way. He did not know that he was thinking on lines that had been thought upon down the centuries, that his boy's thought was kin with those of grown men in less civilised and sophisticated lands and times.

He sat down on a bollard and unconsciously made a tentative gesture with his hands. It brought no one from the dead; but, out of a little house on wheels, a

watchman's shelter that stood in a corner of the shed behind him, came rolling a great fat man with drooping moustache. He had been watching the boy. That day it had got noised abroad among the gamins of the neighbourhood that there was a big sheaf of queer, long grass in that shed and they had been lurking there, earlier, in the hope of filching a few blades. What they wanted it for God knows. It had been among cargo unloaded that morning, loose, on no bill of lading, for packing perhaps.

The watchman abstracted from it, where it leant against his little house, half-a-dozen tall blades and rolling toward Robert held them out without a word. Then he saw that he took the boy by surprise. Just as he asked : " Wasn't this what you were waiting for ? " he realised that the lad was not merely pretending to be engrossed upon a distant view.

" For me ? Oh, thank you, sir. Pampas grass ! "

" So you know the name of it. Now, how do you know the name of it ? "

" We used to have some in a big jar at home. I mean in my home in Serena, Peru. I don't belong to here, really."

" You're a Scots lad," said the watchman, puzzled. " I've seen you about here once or twice."

" Yes, but I'm a Peruvian Scot." He was suddenly very loquacious before this tun of a man with the drooping beer-stained moustache. " I had a brother who travelled all over South America. He was in Patagonia, and in the Gran Chaco too. When he came home once to Serena——" he lingered on the word, he caressed the name, Spanish fashion—" he brought a whole bundle of this grass." And he had the impulse to go on, though he checked it : " And to-day I have left school for ever." Very young still.

When he got back to the diminutive flat in Pollok Street, and entered, Mrs. Cameron greeted him with :

" Ah, there you are, Bobby. Break up all over ? "

" Yes, aunt."

" No prize this year ? " she asked, looking at his hands, empty save for these tall, frail spears.

" No, no prize. But do look at the pampas grass ! "

CHAPTER V

FROM the dim seclusion of a big barn of a farm in the Isle of Rathay, the lower half of the door shut, Robert Barclay looked out upon the storm.

He was at high pitch of elation. In Rathay Sound, that was sheeted over with the deluge, a fish-carrier was rising and dipping, bow to the gale, but for half-an-hour or more she had been as if anchored off Brennan Head although her propeller was whirling. The set of the tide and the gale were allied against her. She merely held her own as one marking time.

Outside in the yard the lances of rain spattered mud in final leaden glints. The gag's end of Pebble Glen, which he could see with an oblique scrutiny by stepping to one side of the door, was a tenebrious wedge of seething storm. He did not look at the harness buckles he was polishing, gave them only an occasional quick glance to see the effect of his rubbing. The wild business of the gale had his elated attention. He laughed with joy in it. Suddenly the fish-carrier's marking time was over. It was as if it took a step, another and another. The alliance against its progress was weakening. The tide was at the turn ; it had only the wind to contend with. He had forgotten all about time.

Across the yard a light leapt in a lower window of the farm, and hanging up the jingling harness he stepped outside, drawing the bisected door shut after him, while the pour of water from the eaves made him duck his head. Throwing the bolts over into place in their slots he executed a series of leaps across the yard.

At the same moment Mary Argyll came from the

cow-byres round the house end, her sleeves rolled up, a pail of milk in either hand, the wind whirling her dress between her legs as though in an attempt to trip her up, flapping her apron about her face, tangling and tossing her coarse black hair. Head atilt she laughed to him, infected with the hilarity of the storm, and clumped away into the flagged dairy.

Robert passed into the farm-house, the door, as soon as he put thumb to latch, tugging him forward. Inside the flames of the candles flapped down, the flame of the lamp leapt up its chimney, and hurriedly he entered and closed the door.

Deep walls these. They enclosed a quiet that seemed as abiding as that of a cave. Old Mrs. MacCulloch sat to one side of the hearth in an easy chair. Ian her son, long, gaunt, bearded, was hunched forward to the other, buckling his leggings. The three collies lay between these two human occupants of that clean sanctuary out of the gale, each in the same attitude, nose on paws. Each rolled an eye aslant as Robert came in ; each flapped its tail once.

Agnes MacCulloch was laying the table that stood at the further side of that long and broad chamber. There was smell of slightly singed oat-cakes, of new scones. Ian rose, his leggings fastened, and glanced at his sister. She nodded. It was always he who took the meals to their boarder, Mr. Dewar, who lived in a little one-roomed house a hundred yards down the hill, a man of whom whisky had got the better. He received each week, from relatives on the mainland, two ounces of tobacco and half-a-dozen newspapers and journals. His three meals a day were carried to him from the farm.

“Weel, it’s better than having a half-wit,” Mrs. MacCulloch would say. “Several times folks have wanted us to tak a half-wit. But I couldna think of it. Him we seldom see, whatever. Just sits there and longs for whisky, and smokes and reads, and when he goes

oot slinks by without a word. Now and then, maybe when it's fair-day at Dulse or Broadrig, he'll gang there and hold a horse for somebody and get a shilling, and whiles when his people send him underclothing he'll sell it and get drunk, and then he'll stop to say some impudence to us. Otherwise he mightna exist."

By the time the candle-flame fluttered and flattened again, and the lamp flame leapt on Ian's return, supper was on the table for all.

"I see Mary's just coming," said Ian, and the chairs rasped on the flags as they seated themselves.

Then Mary entered, laughing at the gust created by her opening of the door, marched over to the fireside, the loose laces of her big boots whipping to and fro, heeled them off and drew on a pair of carpet slippers. Her skin was milky white and her cheeks were touched with such carmine as only the wet winds can give. Sloes were her eyes. Her own sort of gaiety was brimming over that tempestuous afternoon and evening, her heavy jollity.

She was one of these girls called in moments of petty annoyance (or at least Miss MacCulloch thus referred to her in such moments) "that big lump," and in times of liking, "a fine big lass." She had a grin—one does not say it jeeringly, but affectionately—like the Cheshire cat, though occasionally her face could be clouded over with seriousness, and then one less close to earth than she might feel a vague pity for her. Almost her only fault, if one desired to be censorious, was that she could imagine over-wildly. On Fair-days, for instance, when she saw no more than a head above the hedge coming up the lane, her eyes would open wide and an excitement would fill her, and she would wheel round and say: "Oh, here comes Mr. Ian stottin' fou." Yet it would only be that he had lurched as a sober man might over some inequality in the road. It was not that she ardently wished to see him "stottin' fou," but such a sight might have been a diversion, she

never having seen him in that state. She had a zest for excitement. Storms she loved. When the winds screamed she thrilled. She was very fond of Ian, who had a patriarchal way with her.

Ian knew that there were two lives, here and now—one of the day's work, another of the day's thoughts. He was a dreamer. Had he lived in Ober-Ammergau he would have been chosen without question to play the part of Christ in the Passion Play. The likeness to the conventional representations was striking.

Coming to the table, Mary placed both hands on his shoulders, then suddenly bent forward and pressed her cheek to his, laughing because the rain on it wet his beard. To one end of the table Mrs. MacCulloch, observing that familiarity, did not frown but, instead, raised her eyebrows. It was a grimace that meant she had long since passed beyond trying to frown down that hoyden's hoydenish ways. Agnes paid no attention, but poured tea. Mary passed to the farther side of the table and, sidling behind Robert, delivered him a resounding smack on the back. She was a derelict child from an orphanage. Here she was bold and wild and happy, and milked the cows, and carried in the peat divots—for small wages and her board.

"It's going to be a coarse nicht, think ye?" asked the old lady, turning to her son.

"It's letting up a wee," he answered.

"It was great to see the fish-carrier off in the Sound," said Robert.

Ian understood what he had found great.

"She was forging ahead, I noticed, when I went down with Mr. Dewar's supper," he remarked.

"She made it," said Robert jubilantly, as if he had a personal interest in the steamer's success. "She was just in one place a long time, with her propeller spinning. But she made it eventually."

Mary laughed loudly.

"Ye aye speak gentry!" she exploded.

"And why should he not, whatever?" snapped Miss MacCulloch.

It was as if Mary had received a blow, so suddenly her expression turned from animated to crestfallen.

"Oh, I dinna say he shouldn't. I dinna ever say I didna like it, or thought it funny." She turned to Robert. "Ye didna think I was making fun of you, did ye?"

Already he knew her well. He knew that if he gave her the assurance she requested in this sudden solemnity she was likely, quickly at ease again, to take a fresh look at him and comment that, after all, she was making fun of him—"a wee bit." So he merely laughed.

She put out a hand and stroked his cheek.

"Mary, ye're ower bold, ower bold," exclaimed the old lady. "At your age you shouldn't be that free with lads."

"What way no, when I like them? I like ye all here except Miss sometimes when I let fall a pail, or tip up the cream skimmer and she flies into a rage, and—'Aw, lump!' she says."

Agnes was in a good mood and smiled at her. And Ian, setting down his tea-cup after a long drink and passing the back of his hand across his beard, looked affectionately at the wench.

"It's not every lad ye can behave that way with," persisted Mrs. MacCulloch, "stroking his cheek!"

"Weel, I dinna stroke every lad's cheek," Mary replied, her dark eyes glinting merrily. "And I only did it to let him feel my hand cauld wi' the rain. What would they do to me, onyhow?" she inquired.

The old lady lowered her head and wagged it up and down.

"Soon ye might discover," she said.

Her immense gravity made Ian sit back and laugh. Yet there was truth, perhaps, in what she said. The poems of Burns have a lot of the life of these regions in them.

Relaxations were few in Rathay Island. The sweetest

hours that many found were found among the lassies O. The wit at noon, at the harvesting, in the hayfields, was at times Rabelaisian—nay, Sternian. It was not only of the rude guffaw sort. It was often of the sniggering order. Adolescent youth learnt of matters that pricked curiosity during some of these rests, and children there occasionally were before wedlock instead of an engagement ring—though one need not run away with the notion that such was the usage. And over any such accident only once in a blue moon was there a desertion.

Robert was very happy. He felt manly, or near-manly, with all the fragments of knowledge of this and that that he culled. He loved the people. He loved sheep-farming. After all it was true—what he had been told in Serena—though indeed he had kept faith that, despite the first evidence (or lack of evidence), it was the truth, kept faith in the gray firth when the sirens roared and complained: here were the purple hills and the silver streams.

This became his land, his island. The mists, plucked away in shreds like streaming cobweb from a high knob of heathery hill at morning, the crackle of the hot bracken in summer, the whistle of winter winds in keyholes, even in knot-holes of the barn, became his. Ian, too, had this feeling for place, and yet they never spoke of it. Perhaps even Ian, though much older, did not know how to.

On Sundays they worked, but Sundays were field days. They carried each a lunch in a pocket and with the dogs at heel set off slowly up the slopes after breakfast. They trudged round the whole sheep-run, heather stepping, high and low, striding long or leaping over moss-hags (the burnished copper of dropped suns in them) on to little intervening hillocks where the heather-stems were even brittle. They wore heavy boots and thick leggings, not only to go dry-foot but because of the adders of the island.

There were various resting places on the way. When they came to these they sat down without a word, if it was wet first dropping their slickers on the spot. There was a little hill that had, as it were, a hole atop of it, the crown shorn off as one clips off the top of an egg with a knife, and in that hole was a pool with blue or purple centre and black edge, the peat-loam showing at the sides. Always they both stopped and looked at this pool a long time. Robert could never explain its spell. Though without nymphs rising to shatter that dark mirror of the sky, it held him. There was another knoll, one of the established resting and dreaming places of the Sunday trudges, where they could look away down and out over the sea. That was Robert's favourite spot, but Ian's was the edge of a series of dimples where all the view was but of the rolls of grass and heather in and out of each other, a burn twisting on its way among these.

Only once did Ian express himself. They had been sitting looking over that inland rigid turbulence—and peace—of the hills, where the view was only of the rolls of heather and grass. The dogs rose, sniffed, and stared at their masters. And there on the crest of the hill opposite was a full-antlered stag. He stood like a monument, head up, then bounded back the way he had come. Ian glanced at Robert and observed that he saw. So apparently there was nothing to say. But a few moments later :

“ If folks can come back,” he remarked, “ here’s where ye’ll find me—when I get remembering.”

Robert made no reply and Ian did not expect him to speak.

Such were their Sundays. At home Miss MacCulloch was the manager. She banked the money that mutton and wool brought in. She was the prime minister ; Ian was only the king. And sometimes Robert thought, out on these long tours, that if she knew what a holiday they were having she would frown a moment, thinking

they might be better employed. Yet that tour was essential. It gave a big, broad working impression of where the various mobs of sheep were. It was the day of general survey of the farm, and if it was also their day for a survey of life and meditations unproclaimed, the sheep were none the less noted for that.

In a corner of the kitchen on a small table was a great Bible. It was not read, except occasionally, when he was alone, by Ian. He liked the "soond" of parts of it—and perhaps more than the "soond." He was a reticent man. He talked of sheep and crops and thought of other things beside. The Bible lay there in the state of some great classic, the facts of which most learn from the résumés of text-books in school, without troubling to read. The Bible lay there and was dusted. In moments of great stress one wept on it, or touched it. It lay there, that Bible, like a sort of anchor in the corner.

CHAPTER VI

IAN was delighted with Robert's keenness.

"That lad has to be shown only once," was how he expressed his approval when Mrs. MacCulloch inquired how the pupil got along.

Occasional day-dreamings were not culpable for a boy of sixteen. Ian day-dreamed himself. He was hard-working, but he would suddenly desist, relax, and if it was summer lie at length in the heather doing no more than watch the clouds pass over.

He looked upon the lad as ward as much as pupil, having had his story from Mr. Cameron who was a distant "coushin," as he would pronounce it. He was glad that Robert did not, on Saturday evenings, go loafing down to Waterfoot to stand in the knots of other farm-hands and then adjourn to the tap-room of the inn to drink rounds of beer. It was odd, to be

sure, for a farm-hand to spend his free hours drawing pictures, but it was better that he should sit there making studies of Mrs. MacCulloch asleep in her chair than be loafing down at the inn.

And Robert was happy so.

“Ye have gotten her ear ower low,” Mary would say, leaning over the chair behind him; or, “That’s no’ a guid hand. If ye didna see it in a drawing of a body, but alane, it might be a bunch of carrots!”

Such criticism was not derisive of his attempts, merely blunt expression of her interest, and honest advice. Hands, they all decided, concurring with Mr. Cameron’s view regarding his sign-painting brother who was a master at painting pointing ones, were difficult to draw.

It was not every novice Ian would have trusted to take a flock of sheep round the coast road to Dulse all the way. But there was much to do on the Pebble Glen Farm that Robert could not do alone. He would take the risk.

“By night ye can tak’ them,” he said. “There’s no traffic then to bother a body, and what’s more to the point ye’ll get them round in the cool, ye see. Just dander along. That’s all. Ye’ll find it easy. Gie them their time. They can have a bit nibble where there’s banks of grass alongside the road. Aw, but ye ken it all by now.”

The selected sheep they drove down to the “laigh pasture”—the pasture-field below the high road. That was in preparation, and the morning’s work. In the afternoon Ian told Robert he had better go and have a nap.

“Take your boots off and loosen your braces,” he said, “and have a couple of hours’ snooze. Ye’ll have nane all night, walking into the morning.”

You can take a horse to water but you cannot make him drink. Robert, in the small, low-ceilinged room that was his, took off his boots and loosened his braces

and lay down on the bed with the quilt drawn over him, but he did not sleep. Here was something out of the ordinary routine. He was youthfully elated over a trust, his pleasure no doubt much of the same sort as that which a sheep-dog feels when, learning the business, it is granted a word or look or approval.

Very quiet it was in the little box of a room, but he did not sleep. He heard the sigh of a wind over the undulations of the hills. He lay there looking at the whitewash of the ceiling, the light in it, the tones of light, and observing how there was even a thin reflected radiance in the shadows at the corners. Mary's heavy boots beat over the cobbles below, regular as a soldier's tread. The drawling, clucking chatter of hens to their chickens came up to him, the sound creating pictures of them pacing slow, high-stepping, peering for stray pickings between the stones of the yard. He heard the chink of a handle dropped on a pail. Miss MacCulloch sneezed loudly, as though she would get every atom of pleasure out of it. He imagined her raising her head and trying to sneeze again. He had seen her last over in the barn filling a pillow-case with feathers.

He thought of the Camerons, the room in Pollok Street, its windows closed against the ceaseless shouting and screaming of children and the soot smuts, thought of the red-bricked patio of the house in Serena, Peru. He thought of his mother. And suddenly he was attempting to understand her, to put himself in her place. He tried to imagine how he would feel, dying, and saying nothing about it to some one whom he had to look after, so as not to pain that person. Had she known that his father, in hospital, was dying too? Why was she so anxious to have him sent away?

The childish memories leapt to life, with a light on them of later experience. He recalled his father and, lying there in the Isle of Rathay, it came to him that the look on his father's face was the same as on the

face of Mr. Dewar—the “drouth”—of whom he had occasional glimpses. A man like that could not be trusted to look after a child. She may not have known that her husband was dying; she may only have wanted, before she passed herself, to be sure the boy was away in safer keeping.

He tried to put himself in her place. But these efforts were wearying for the mind of a lad. His eyelids drooped. He fell asleep. But that was a theme to which he would return, no doubt.

“Supper! Supper!”

Mary calling, down in the yard, woke him.

He felt much older after that sleep! He drew on his boots, buckled his leggings, slipped his braces over his shoulders and thrusting his arms into his jacket sleeves went downstairs—a drover, a drover, going out on the road with a flock of sheep all the way to Dulse.

Ian accompanied him to the low pasture, supper over. They let down the gate bars and—

“You do it,” said Ian. “You may as well do the whole thing from the start. You can have Bruce and Wally with you. Donald will bide with me.”

Robert signed to Bruce and the dog passed into the field, circled the flock and at the far side, at a call from Robert, halted and then zigzagging behind the sheep sent them out. They came tittuping on to the road. They saw the man and boy downhill, a little way from the gate, and went billowing uphill, under the impression, it seemed, that they were to return to the high farm and the glen. Robert quickly gave an order to Bruce, who dashed in behind the hedge, rushed uphill, plunged out where the highway ran and there stood, blocking the upward road. The leaders of the flock hesitated, uncertain.

“Ye’d better use Wally also now,” suggested Ian, his first advice.

At a word from Robert, Wally was behind the hedge and up to the main road on the side indicated. The

dogs understood which way the flock was to go. One word more and the woolly backs were flowing southward on the highway.

"Ye're off," said Ian. "Ye know who ye have to speir for at Dulse. Come in ahint, Donald. Ye'll be all right? Ye feel competent to do it, I think?"

"Yes, Mr. MacCulloch."

"Fine."

Ian stood at the cross-roads watching the backs of the sheep quaking along the road and Robert, as to the manner born, moving away in a slow trudge behind, stick under arm, a dog on either side of him.

An extraordinary thing happened to Ian then. He was a bachelor, confirmed bachelor people said; but what he felt, it struck him then, was something like what a father may feel watching his boy at times. The emotion was more vague than particular. That man of two lives, work and reverie, stood some time staring after the lad.

"It's like life," he thought to himself. "It's a journey."

His eyes were strangely moist as he turned uphill toward the farm.

CHAPTER VII

THE sheep safely delivered in Dulse to the man for whom he did not, as it happened, have to "speir"—he coming out of the house to meet Robert as soon as the flock appeared, and instructing him where to "fauld" them—the young drover was about to turn away. But old Walter Wylie of Dulse (everybody in the sheep business over wide area knew Watty in those days) had a word of praise for him.

"Well, young man," he said, "you and the dogs, or maybe it should be the dogs and you, handled that very well. Ye know your work as well as they do. Let me

see." Wylie studied him openly, and then with an ingratiating twinkle inquired: " You will be in the nature of a pupil, I take it ? "

" I'm learning the sheep-farming," replied Robert.

" Aye, I thought so by a something about you. Well, you'll not take a tip, then, but you'll take a bite to eat and drink with me ? "

" Thank you, sir."

Leading the way, Watty Wylie marched with a proprietorial air into the taproom of Dulse Hotel.

It was Robert's first visit to such a place and he slightly swaggered, following that big swaggerer. He made a sudden jump in development, it seemed, passing that portal ; and the interior thrilled him, though why he could not tell. Was it pictorially it inveigled this youth so prone to pictorial appeal ? Did he wish then that he were an inn-keeper (because of the dusky glow of old polished wood there, and glints of reflected light in glass on shelves so shadowed that the outlines of the bottles or tumblers responsible were not remarked, and for the shadows running under gleaming tables into corners, deep shadows that made a distant table seem to be supported by a leg and a half), as he had wished to be a sheep-farmer because of a picture of sheep on the long purple rolls of a painted moor in which, magically, in little pools of dark peaty water were splinters of dropped blue sky ? Hardly ! It was as if he had memories of this interior, or of kindred interiors, but memories obliterated, unseizable.

" Grand day ! "

" Grand day ! "

" What will ye have ? " Watty asked the lad.

" Anything you like, sir."

" Oh, give us some bread and cheese and a couple of glasses of whisky."

Honour indeed to be treated thus, as a man. He was surely a drover now.

" What might your name be ? " said Watty Wylie

when they sat down one on each side of one of the tables that were dark in their glow as moss-hags at dusk.

“Barclay, Robert Barclay.”

“Barclay. It’s not a common name, I’m thinking. One other Barclay I kent. There used to be a Barclay came here from Glasgow, oh, many a year ago. Now there, I’ll tell ye, was a man to drink the whisky neat ! A shipper he was. He had a fleet of old clippers in the South American trade. He came here two-three years. It was here he met his wife. Then he did not come for long. Next, he came back one year sorely changed. He used to be couthie in liquor, but that last time he was getting crabbed with it. Aye, it was here he met his wife to be. A fine lass, a fine lass. Her father was a painter—Robert Gartmore was his name. Not a house-painter, ye ken—eh, no bread ? Oh, that’ll do nicely, Donald. The biscuits and cheese’ll do fine, and the whisky. Ye’ll not forget that. Aye, what they call an artist-painter. It was his business, ye see, not just a hobby. He was great on character studies. I called him a painter, but he was more on what do you call it ? Etching, aye, etching. You draw on a copper plate with a needle. I heard the process, for he told me himself, but anyhow you take prints off a plate on to your paper, instead of drawing on the paper.”

“What was the daughter like—that this shipping man married ?”

“Like ? Oh——” he put a hand out about on a level with the table, “I knew her that height, with her socks down in her wee shoes. A bonny bairn she was, and grew up into a bonny lass. That time she came back with her husband after long absence was towards the end. I’m thinking she’d gotten him to come for a sentiment of the earlier days, maybe to see if that would change him. Or maybe she wanted to see once more where she was happy as a lassie, summer after summer with that father of hers. He was a widower—

och, but what am I talking to a lad about all this for ? O aye, it was your name started me. Aye, aye. That's life, and ye have scarce embarked upon it yet, if ye do think ye are a great shepherd ! What age would ye take me for, lad ? "

" I'm no judge of ages, sir," said Robert.

When it was told he was old enough in such wisdom to say, amazed of manner : " I'd never have thought it, sir ! "

But Watty's age he forgot then promptly if he ever rightly heard it. His young face was strained. He was far off in spirit. He was in Serena ; and he saw there two pictures over the sideboard in the dining-room. Often he used to get up on tiptoe to lift the lid of the cheese-dish that stood there as a central decoration instead of being put in a cupboard, and filch a piece of cheese. It had seemed to him that he was watched by the two men on the wall in these pictures. Their eyes were on him. When he crept away with the pilfered morsel, looking over his shoulder, their gaze would be following him. He remembered now (eating biscuits and cheese in this mellow inn at Dulse) that his mother once told him her father made those pictures. He recalled Mrs. Cameron's mention of the fact that his grandfather painted. " Just a hobby," she had said. Old Watty Wylie had known his mother when she was *that* height, the height of the table. The young drover seemed to have gone into what Watty would have called a dwaum.

The old man, with " Well, good-health ! " followed by a backward cast of his head and an upward jerk of his elbow, gulped down the contents of his glass and, crouched as though to rise, launched a look at Robert. The lad took the hint, drank down his tot and tried not to make a face over the interior scald of it.

" You'll be wanting to take the road," said Wylie. He rose and swaggered out ahead of Robert, in the doorway half-turning over his shoulder to say :

"Good-bye, lad. I'll tell MacCulloch when I see him that ye brought the drove alone fine, fine."

It was a changed Robert who set out from Dulse, the two dogs with him, on his homeward way. As for all this that he had heard of his forebears, reticently making no admission to Watty Wylie of whom he had been talking (and an astonished old man he would have been had he known), at first it was the pity of his mother's life he pondered. But that passed. The dominant consideration was that her father, Robert Gartmore, had been a painter, an etcher, a maker of "character" studies—"it was his business, ye ken, not just a hobby."

That discovery elated him. At the age of six or seven to be told something of the sort about his grandfather had meant little or nothing, the chief service of that information being, perhaps, to give him reassurance that those eyes on the wall did not truly observe his thefts of cheese, were only eyes drawn by mamma's papa. Even at the age of nine or ten the intimation dropped by Mrs. Cameron that his grandfather had done some paintings made little impression. But now! Now to have this information imparted to him (and he sixteen) caused a perturbation, a strange happy disorder, an excitement within him. For he too tried to register, to record, the things he, ever so poignantly, saw.

CHAPTER VIII

MUCH of the island life was but a pictorial one to Robert. He knew it through his eyes. But of the MacCullocs he had knowledge come at by other channels than those of sight, though less consciously. He had little biographies of them in his mind—illustrated. He knew, from this and that (though youth, to be sure, doesn't bother much over such things) that when Mrs. MacCulloch died, Agnes would marry. He

knew that as all knew it in Pebble Glen—even Mr. Dewar, who only slunk past as if wishful not to be seen.

Adam MacPherson, who had two carriers' carts on the road and himself drove the brake from Dulse to Carsaig—stopping for lunch at Waterfoot—was the man who was to marry Agnes in God's good time. The old lady would die and he would then live in Pebble Glen farm. Mr. Dewar would die, or be sent packing, and Ian could live in his little cottage. With the carrier business Adam would still continue. They would be comfortable and happy; such was their planned romance.

Robert was certain that Mrs. MacCulloch was aware of all these designs, at least in their general trend if not in detail. Agnes was in no hurry, nor was Adam. Theirs was a courtship of convenience. Both were saving money for that future, to make improvements, pull down barns and build bigger ones, make extensions. But sometimes the old lady, by hints that individually were too frail to inform her but in the mass were like a shout, aware of what was intended, and that her demise was necessary for perfect fulfilment, would sit very sad by the fire. Even when others were in the kitchen she would seem much alone then, pensively withdrawn. The thought would come to her that if she hung on a long time, if she made very old bones as they say, it might seem to Adam and to her daughter that their plans were unduly slow of coming to fulfilment. Occasionally she thought to suggest that they should be married soon, let her go to live in Mr. Dewar's cottage, he sent away. But Agnes had never breathed a word of even being engaged to Adam. Engagements in Rathay are nobody's business till the engaged couple make announcement. Mrs. MacCulloch would sigh. She'd sink lower in her chair, and smooth her apron with a gesture that might, to some sensitive observer present, have seemed to have all the sorrow of age in it.

As for Ian's affairs : Agnes was of the opinion that her brother would never marry, was a confirmed bachelor. That would fit in with her plans too. She was a manager. She could nip what seemed like the bud of a love-affair for Ian, either by seeing that the wench in question was cold-shouldered away or by discovering what opinions she held that were not Ian's and, assiduously throwing them together and leading the conversation to a revelation on the girl's part of her view on this or that, cool his ardour while it was still but tepid.

On her courtship Ian smiled comprehendingly. He comprehended much. His life, in fact, may not have been arranged nearly so much by his managing sister as she imagined. He was sufficiently tolerant to dismiss what annoyance he may have felt at her belief that she arranged it. No harm in that ! When he wished to do what she advised, or ordered (she adopted more and more the dictatorial tone as her mother grew less active) it would have been childish of him, by his way of seeing things, to have told her he'd be obliged if she'd attend to her own part of the farm affairs and leave him to his. Complacent but not a serf, no doubt, was the tranquil Ian. Usually she gave orders for him to do that he had full intention of doing. If she gave direction for him to do something not to his mind it was merely as though he had not heard, or forgot. Very tolerant was Ian.

Adam came to supper on Saturday evenings and any one could see without need of it being pointed out—even Mary could see, even Robert could see—how things were there. Glints and glances across the table told all without further evidence. Supper over, Mary would clear away the dishes. Adam would sit bolt upright talking to Mrs. MacCulloch and Ian while Agnes knitted or worked on a circle of everlasting crochet that seemed kept for these occasions, a sentimental bit of crochet that she worked on with a lustre in her eyes, aware that from time to time Adam's gaze

rested on her. Then Mrs. MacCulloch would think it about time for her to go to bed, if Adam would excuse her. And Miss MacCulloch would tell Mary it was about time she was "beddit" also. "We'll tak' a look out before we turn in," Ian would say to Robert, and they would go out into the yard. If the night was gracious, with a moon, they would stroll up to the moor a little way, where the lapwings would still be calling. There would be the sound of the burns running down for ever, and of the pulse of the sea perhaps coming up to them.

If the night was wet or chill they would potter in the barn, or visit the horses in the stable, lighting the lamp there, sit on a bale of hay a while, Ian now and then saying: "Uh-hu!" or naming the horses for the pleasure of seeing them turn their heads to look at him. From his pocket he would produce a copy of *The People's Friend* and pore over its Poet's Corner, or the last contribution to some series of Auld Scots Legends, or Shepherds' Tales, or Our Ballads and Their Makers. Robert would just look on at it all, loving a stable in the lamplight: the fragment of lit rafters and the caverns of shadow, the sleekness of a groomed haunch, or the unexpected huge sickle of hoof when one bent a leg, in the way horses have when resting. After they had gone to bed, half-asleep, they would be wakened by a step in the yard—Adam going home.

In the midst of a great sheep-dipping, Mr. and Mrs. Cameron came down for a long week-end just before the summer visitors who rented part of the farm were to arrive—that part, prepared in good time for these, at their disposal.

They had come to say good-bye to Robert and, as Mrs. Cameron put it, see where he was so that they could picture him "from far across the sea." Everything conspired to decide their departure far across the sea. The doctor had repeatedly told Mr. Cameron that what he needed was change of occupation for the sake

of his lungs. The baker for whom he had been working was giving up business. Mrs. Cameron's brother, Alex, had often wanted them to go to California. Alderman he had been in the town where he had settled there, which was like being a bailie, said she, and now he was as ye might say the Lord Provost. Now he was mayor of the town and could find some kind of situation for his brother-in-law.

Even regarding Robert there was, to Mrs. Cameron's great consolation (for she could only act if all the signs decreed it), suggestion of a divinity shaping all for them. The gentleman who had been consul in Serena when Robert was a wee laddie there, Mr. Ewart Lang, had come back to Glasgow and had called at Pollok Street to "ask after" the boy. She had his card in her purse. Any time that he might stand in need of advice he was not to hesitate to write or call. Mr. Cameron thought that when the period of tuition at Pebble Glen was over, he would be a good man for Robert to consult regarding the possibility of getting into some situation that at least would lead, eventually, to one as a land-steward, because of his good education in addition to the farming lore he was gathering.

There was an element of shock for Robert in all this. Early in life it had been made known to him that conditions seemingly fixed and continuing are not always so. Here, in Rathay, he had often thought of the Camerons as older human beings held in reserve against urgent need, and of their home as a refuge in time of trouble, should trouble come. That room in Pollok Street with the closed windows had been as a sanctuary at need. To know it was there was good, as to Mrs. MacCulloch and Agnes that big Bible on the corner-table was consolatory. It was there. It was in place. The farm at Pebble Glen was not yet his centre. And here was news now that his centre was about to be gutted. Others would occupy that two-room and kitchen "house." The Camerons would be far off.

These were, chiefly, the considerations that caused the silence with which he heard their tidings. Then—

“ You have been good to me,” he said. He held his head high. He was nearly seventeen years of age then. “ It will be splendid for you. You will be glad to see your brother again.”

But having thus spoken the distant gaze came back again to his eyes.

“ He took it real well,” said Mr. Cameron to his wife afterwards. “ He felt it. He’s fond of us. You could see it then. It’s nice to know he got fond of us. Maybe even for him this is all for the best. Why, when he gets through here, we might be able to arrange a situation for him on one of the big sheep-farms in California, some position that would eventually lead to him being the manager.”

The deepest result for Robert, perhaps, of these disclosures of the Camerons’ plans for change (part gay, part sad, part hopeful, part regretful) was to revive a youthful emotion and to it link another: Serena to Cork, Cork to Greenock, Greenock to Glasgow and Pollok Street, then the doldrums of school, and next Pollok Street hither: a journey. And now he knew that everybody was journeying. With a pinch at his heart he considered how all were on the way somewhere. And with that thought came a surge of emotion, of affection for them all—all those whom he encountered on the way.

But the sheep had to be dipped, *whatever*. On the long heather slopes the dogs held them. Their bleating went on all day like prolonged cheering, noisy as Pollok Street. Ever and again a fresh batch of them was herded into the pen before the dip. There Robert wrestled. Sheep after sheep he grabbed and thrust into the chute. At the other end Ian grabbed it and led it struggling through the tank. The odour in the immediate vicinity of these activities, according to Mrs. Cameron, was a blend of chemist’s shop and country.

Their four days passed in an ecstasy of interest in the work and delight in the "caller air"—beyond the sheep-dip, that is. The parting was pain. Driving them to Dulse (all three constrained and seeing the beauty of the way and hearing the lapwings call with a feeling in their hearts as though it were autumn instead of summer's beginning) he knew how he loved that care-worn pair. He wished that he could tell them and was stricken dumb. Mrs. Cameron wept at the end, alighted on the beach, the steamer off-shore. Mr. Cameron coughed and coughed. Robert swallowed a lump in his throat. Then Mrs. Cameron, who had not kissed the little boy who had come to her care, suddenly, at the parting, with an impulsive angular gesture, drew the young man to her as he were her own son, embraced him, kissed his cheek.

On the way back to the mainland, and that home that so soon they would be leaving as a shell for others to occupy, they talked of him.

"Well, he's turning into a big strong lad," said Mr. Cameron. "The open-air life is building him up again. He stands fine and erect and has lost that kind o' pinched look he was showing when he was a quick-growing callant."

"Yes, he is that, a strong lad. He's not getting coarsened, either. One might think that such a life would coarsen him. All among animals! Did you hear Miss MacCulloch telling her brother he'd have to see about that cow that was roaring for the bull? Oh, I think it's dreadful!"

Mr. Cameron laughed tolerantly.

"That doesn't bother them," he said.

"I suppose not." Then she had another thought.

"The lass that milks the cows, now; what do you think of her?"

"A strong girl. A big, sturdy wench." He turned his head slowly and caught her gaze. "Oh, he'll be all right," he assured her.

"I hope so. She's bold."

"I think he'll be all right."

CHAPTER IX

SHORTLY after the dipping, Miss MacCulloch went to Glasgow, to go to Glasgow as great an event for her as, to the Camerons, to visit the Isle of Rathay.

While she was away Ian went to Dulse with two rams for the fair being held there, these not driven but carried in a cart. He left before sunrise and would not be home till after supper time.

Mrs. MacCulloch that day had a revived and accentuated air of actual instead of formal queen. She felt that she should be looking after things. There was no need. Mary's cry of "Sookie, sookie, sookie!" sounded at the ordained times. The thudding of the churn (the old Victorian churn with its tall protruding pole handle), after the preliminary splashing of it, on a beat sufficiently regular, and with sufficiently few halts, proclaimed that the "big lump" was busy with the butter-making and taking no more than legitimate rests. Robert was at work hauling peat and building a drying stack, the rattle of the returning cart sounding on the cobbles every now and then, even before Mrs. MacCulloch thought it was time to step out and look over the moor to see if he was coming.

The day wore on, a cloudless day of summer's beginning and supper was served not to lamplight, or even the hints of dusk, but with the sun rays slanting down into the big flagged kitchen and lying on the table.

As Mary carried away the dishes Mrs. MacCulloch struck a pose as of consternation and looked down at the girl's feet.

"What way have ye got on your best shoes?" she demanded.

"They are my ain shoes," replied Mary, rebellious.

"I'm no' saying they are not. But what company do you expect the night?"

What company indeed? Mary never had company. Her nearest approach to social converse (apart from that of the farm) was in ogling some farm-hand in the shop of Brennan while waiting her turn to be served, if by any chance she was sent there.

"Oh, weel," she said, "ye see it's fair day at Dulse but I'm no' at it, working all the day, and so I thought I would put on my best shoes for the evening."

"Are ye gone gite?" inquired Mrs. MacCulloch. "Ye are no' at it so ye put on your best shoes! What kind of an explanation do you call that? If ye was at it ye might put on your braw shoes."

The sanity of Mary's behaviour and explanation might have been obvious to some. Mrs. MacCulloch had forgotten her youth. Or perhaps in her youth she had been a different sort of lass. More likely she had forgotten it.

Mary, at that, came as near to tears as to rebellion.

"Small chance I have to be at it," she snapped, and then was horrified at herself for thus exploding and laughed guiltily.

"Ye might as weel take them off."

"I'm done with the day's work," said Mary, gaining courage again. "I'm going to keep them on—seeing I was no' at the fair," she added quickly, half in renewed explanation and half as a plea for pity.

"You are *nut* done with the day's work. Ye have the dishes to wash."

Mary turned abruptly and went away to the scullery, and Robert passed out slowly to feed the dogs.

That clatter of dishes that came to his ears was not rebellious, not subdued but not vehement. There was no high reproachful or contemptuous singing. Poor Mary, he thought. It was only natural that she should want to change her shoes in the evening. A hard world

for her, now and then, when her gaiety broke down. After all, he considered, her heavy work-boots and the clumping trudge they enforced on the lass were greatly responsible for the term of opprobrium, "big lump," that Agnes at times launched after her. Occasionally, for ease, Mary would loosen the laces of these clog-like heavy boots and not tuck them inside properly. Then, as she crossed the kitchen, there would be their *swish-swish* added to the clump-clump as she walked. If it amused her when one boot-lace, caught in a hook of the neighbour boot, came near sending her sprawling and she averted the fall by grabbing Ian or Robert, emitting a sound as of a low-pitched cheer as she did so, that was but evidence to them of her jolly nature. Only the women noticed that such collisions were seldom with them. It came natural to Mary to grab the male for support rather than the female.

Outside, Robert was suddenly deep in a tremendous consideration upon the seemingly trivial subject of boots. He wore heavy boots; Ian too. But theirs seemed never a source of annoyance to Miss Mac Culloch or to her mother. Why should Mary's? A girl could not be the female clodhopper of the place and step dainty as a princess in satin shoes. To be sure, he and Ian, loosening their laces, did not seem so uncouth. If the ends fell out they stooped and tucked them in. Yes, perhaps Mary was clumsy, but these women badgered her too much, especially Agnes. And here was the old lady at it in her daughter's absence, as if it was essential. Badgering!

He was sorry for Mary. Since the Camerons' visit he had felt under a cloud himself, horribly aware of a long road ahead, and a dubious road. He had not tried to draw anything since that visit, had not wanted to, had not seen things in the way one sees when wanting to draw.

Poor Mary! Why badger her? If she put on carpet slippers before all the outside duties were done, then she

had to take them off again to go out. And why shouldn't she now, if she liked, wear a pair of shoes in the evening that were, though her best, just the sort that Agnes MacCulloch wore for her day's duties, in and out? *Braw* shoes, indeed! Behold how great a matter a small fire kindleth.

He strolled to the lower end of the yard and leant on the gate there, looking down over the fields to the sea. Behind he heard Mary humming, and then Mrs. MacCulloch's voice pursuing :

“Where are ye off to?”

“I'm just going to the yard-end to see if I can see Mr. Ian coming,” Mary called back.

“He'll not be coming for some time, whatever,” Mrs. MacCulloch replied.

But Mary walked on and leant on the gate beside Robert. She was silent, silent as Ian at this ceremony of leaning on a gate. Robert glanced at her. She sniffed. Then big tears rolled down her cheeks.

“What's the matter, Mary?” he asked.

“Did ye no' hear?”

“Oh, that! Don't you bother,” said he, tenderly. He had the impulse to put an arm round her to console her, but refrained.

“If I keep my clogs on I'm a lump. If I put on my good shoon—I dinna ken what I am.”

His thoughtful aspect brought back her merriment. She was one of those who laugh at others without ill-will. And she healed quickly of her wounds.

“Oh,” she said abruptly, “the auld wife is right. My work isna done. I've nut looked at the stray hens' places for eggs.” She opened the gate and passed into a narrow path in the cornfield. “Come on with me, Rab, and I'll show you where one is,” and she caught his hand and drew him after her.

Tears were gone. She was the big, bold, grinning lass again. Laughing, he followed. Along the thin track in the young corn she led. Then she stopped.

“Look!”

There were two eggs gleaming in a little final circle where the path ended. She picked them up and turned, and they walked back to the yard.

“There’s anither one away up at the ither end of the farm. I’ll look there the morn—or later,” and she laughed. “I canna be bothered the now.”

She walked over to the milk-room and disappeared there.

“Is that you, Mary?” came Mrs. MacCulloch’s voice from the kitchen.

“Aye, it’s me.”

“What are ye doing?”

“My work wasna done. I was looking at the stray hens’ places for eggs. I was putting two awa that I found.”

“Oh!”

Mary came back to the gate again.

“Where are ye off to now?” called Mrs. MacCulloch.

“I’m just going doon the hill to watch for Mr. Ian.”

“It’s not long since I told you he couldna be home for a while. Time must flee for you.”

“It canna flee quick enough for me,” said Mary, coming back to Robert but not calling out for Mrs. MacCulloch to hear, “if I’m to be treated this way. I’ll be glad when I’m auld enough to choose for myself and leave them. Oh, I shouldna have said that. I’m happy enough here.”

Well, at school he had learnt something of that feeling. Equal education is not necessary for the exchange of human sympathy. He felt very close to Mary. The young man’s pulse quickened, there beside her at the gate.

“Where’s Rab?” came Mrs. MacCulloch’s voice.

“How should I ken where Rab is?” Mary called back on the instant before Robert could reply that he was close at hand. She was not slow in everything. As she made that reply she grabbed him by the arm.

"Come on," she whispered, "we'll gang doon and meet Ian. I aye call him Ian to myself. It's Mr. Ian in the hoose."

They went swinging down that double-rutted road, hand in hand, talking and laughing gaily. As they reached the cross-roads where the highway ran north and south, and the continuation of their lane passed down across it to the beach, the low pasture, and the scattered houses of Brennan, the postman on his return journey to Dulse came in sight.

There is a dip in the road to north there. He was walking beside his cart, or waddling rather, waddling and rolling in his gait. As he drew level he stopped, and at once the horse stopped also. He put back his head and laughed as though the sight of these two delighted him.

"Was ye waiting for a local letter from the north?" he asked.,

"No," said Mary and Robert together.

"Just waiting to see the postie gang by," he suggested.

He wheezed as he spoke. He was a man of great physique but his breath was short. He could lift mighty loads, but was left panting after doing so. The strength remained, the staying power was gone. He smoked ceaselessly a short cutty pipe charged with "thick black." For the inclemency of the weather he partook of a dram at certain places on the road, and even if the weather was not inclement had the drams there by use and wont. If he met or overtook anybody whom he did not definitely dislike—and he seemed to be warm of heart to practically all the world—then they had a dram together. His perspiration was of whisky, beads of whisky. His eyeballs were yellow. His beard was as red flame.

"Ye're not waiting for a letter from your jo, or your beau, eh? Weel, we'll have a dram."

He passed to the rear of his cart and without looking

into it, just thrusting in his hand, educed a bottle. He came back laughing, and Mary laughed with him. He pinched her chin in response, and she tucked it down, retreated giggling.

“Here ye are, lassie.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“You tak’ a soop and ye’ll see.”

“No. I’ll nut. It’s whisky.”

“And what is against whisky?” he demanded.

“I’m ower young.”

“Oh, the lad will answer for that. Is she ower young?”

Robert glanced at her.

“If she says she is, I suppose she is,” said he, in a voice almost sullen.

The postman roared laughter so loud that the horse looked round.

“Ah, weel, here we are,” said he.

He handed the bottle to Robert who took it, and with a memory of what was presumably the “right thing,” as learnt from Watty Wylie, remarked: “Well, good-health,” elevated it and gulped. The gulp over he kept a straight face, though the fire of that spirit burnt his throat and stomach.

The postman laughed again, watching him.

“To the manner born,” he said. “You didna make a moo.”

He made a “moo” himself, before drinking, then tilted the bottle and the liquid gurgled down. No “moo” after that long pull. He wiped his beard with the back of his hand and smacked his lips.

“I make a moo before drinking. After drinking I smack my lips,” he explained lest they had failed to be impressed by his pantomime. He drove the cork in with the butt of his clenched hand. “Well, we’ll be stepping,” he said. In passing he pinched Mary’s chin, roared another laugh, and said: “Ower young, eh? No’ ower young for everything,” winked at Robert,

clucked to the horse, and went on along the road laughing.

“ Oh, what he sayd ! ” Mary exploded. And then : “ Do ye find that yon drink goes to your head ? ”

He did, but he replied nonchalantly : “ Pooh ! No ! ”

She crossed the road and, scrambling up the bank, looked over the hedge into the low pasture. Sheep were moving to and fro far down, in straggling strings. Robert, following her, emitted a whistle and up went their heads, and they halted in the midst of a step. He shouted a command as to a dog and they mobbed. He shouted again, and the sheep ran to left. Another shout and they wheeled away to right. Still another and they ran along the field in a straight line.

“ Come in AHINT ! ” he called.

The sheep halted.

“ I canna see the dog,” said Mary. “ Which one is it ? I canna see it. I didna notice a dog coming with us.”

“ There is no dog,” Robert replied.

“ No dog ! What do ye mean ? Oh, aye, I believe I once heard Mr. Ian telling aboot the sheep doing that at times.”

“ Well, you’ve seen it now,” said Robert. “ There are plenty of them there who know enough to do it, and the others follow. They know the calls as well as the dogs, and run this way and that.”

“ Do you think they think there’s a dog, though they canna see him ? Or are they just running that way to the order like ? Ye ken what I mean.”

“ I don’t know whether they think there’s a dog or not. I think they do, from the way the ones on the edges keep looking round. But anyhow they know the meaning of the orders to the dogs, you see.”

“ Aye, I see that. It’s wunnerful, wunnerful.”

She grasped his arm and clung to it, looking down at the sheep then contentedly feeding, their trepidation forgotten. The far-off bellow of a cow sounded again

and again, imperative, angry. From that bank of roadside where they stood at the top of the low pasture they could see a long stretch of the main road winding on northward, and there came a sound that made them glance down to it. A great glossy stallion with curved neck and nostrils dilating was coming up the slope with a muffled plug-plug of his prancing hoofs. Beside it trudged a small, stocky, but furtive-looking man. The daylight was drifting away. He did not see them, plodding on with downcast head. Belike he was anxious to get to his journey's end before dark. They stood silent, looking at him and the high-stepping stallion till these, horse and man, went from sight and only the proud plug-plug sounded, sounded fainter, passed away.

Mary's thought turned to an earlier subject.

"It seems a pity that those sheep," said she, "when they ken so much, have just to be mutton in the end."

"That's so," he agreed, and looked away to west where the elaborate pageant of the sunset was being prepared.

The last of an old sliced haystack was just beyond the hedge.

"Come into the field and have a seat while we're waiting," he said, and ran down the bank to the gate, Mary leaping behind.

They entered the field and he stooped and felt the hay.

"It's dry," he said.

"Is it?" she asked, looking down.

"Yes," and he dropped to his heels, glancing up at her.

She was staring at that cataclysmic radiance, that pomp of the day's end, almost a nightly spectacle yet each evening different from the evening before. The Sound was a chiaroscuro of waters, glints and shadows, drowning purples and greens glimpsed and erased, a bewildering haze of red over it all as if the red was in one's eyes. Beyond the Sound the peaks of Rona, and

the whole flank of Rona, made one high flat and smoky blueness against that silencing sunset. It was a vision of cloud islands with tenuous peaks, with shifting promontories, all in blues and pinks and blinding gold—the whole tinted with ethereal red.

“ Sit down,” said Robert.

He put out a hand and linked his fingers with hers. She stood very erect and solemn, then suddenly subsided with a forward bobbing motion of her knees.

Down there below the main road were (may still be, probably still are) many clumps of trees, though above there are only sloping fields and then the heather. Close by stood three chestnut trees, old, buxom, benign. An evening wind then sighed in their world of leaves that was tinted also with these sunset glows.

“ Ye ken Ecky MacAlpine ? ” she asked, turning to him.

“ Yes.”

“ Do ye like him ? ”

He had so far merely evaded Ecky instead of cultivating him, but he did not say plump and plain that he disliked him.

“ I prefer John Reid to him,” said he.

“ I ken what ye mean. They kind of run together,” said Mary, “ but I think that’s only because they are near neighbours. Ecky is aye wanting me to go with him.”

“ Oh ! ”

“ I don’t think I’ll go with him. I’d rather go with some fella I liked better.” She turned and looked at him. “ Your eyes are shining,” she said. “ Is’t yon whisky ye had from the postie ? ”

Here, alone, there were none of these clappings and thumps from her. Robert laughed in reply to her question. A pensive creature was the “ big lump ” then ; and he was annoyed at recollection of that term for her. She had no hat on, and the little breezes that sighed in the chestnuts, stirred in them, set them

ponderously tossing, played with her hair, flicking little curls in and out. Far west were more and more high islands, a vast archipelago into infinity. Only clouds they were in the sky. Hard to believe they were only clouds then. Isles of the Blest they seemed.

Robert, reclining on an elbow, looked at that sunset and then at Mary. Her plump throat was milky white. She glanced down at him, and as for her dark eyes—they shone with no “whusky” from the postman. He put up a hand and felt that plump throat very tenderly.

At once, with a sigh, she lay back with her head on his shoulder. He kissed her cheek that had the same loveliness as her throat, but with natural roses in it. Having kissed her once, tenderly, he kissed her, urgently, again and again. She swerved back from that rain of kisses, not alarmed so much as satisfied. In the buxom chestnut clump there was agitation, a sound as of leafy thunder. It died away. It ended on a sigh that went inexplicably into the lad.

The sunset was smouldering down, down, the Isles of the Blest were fading, thinning away in dun vapour, revealing the fact that they were but clouds. A dog barked far-off, accentuating space.

“I like being here with you,” she said, her voice husky. “With a lad like Ecky it would be different. I’m safe with you, am I no’?”

He gulped and nodded his head.

Mary never rinsed all the soap out of her clothes, though always washing, a clean lass. He was aware then of that homely smell of soap. And there was the smell of old hay. The cow bellowed in distance. A dying sunset, a sighing of wind and trees, a dog’s far-off bark accentuating space: all went into him with a feeling of unity. Ecstasy and sorrow: together they possessed him—inexplicable sorrow, strange ecstasy.

“The stars are out!” Mary ejaculated in an accent as of panic, and flurriedly she rose. “Oh, we’ve been here a long time. It’s night.”

He scrambled after her.

" Oh, I say ! " she exclaimed.

" What ? "

" Suppose that Mr. Ian came alang, and went up the lane, and we never saw him ? "

That the stars were already beginning to show, and all so swiftly, nay, suddenly it seemed, and he unaware that time had existed, made this also possible. As they trudged uphill the scent of the hawthorn in the lane was more heady than he had ever known it. He wanted to gather together and keep all the hawthorn scent, and the crumbling sunsets, and that drizzling passing light of day's end, and the shaken sigh and subdued uproar of the trees. He was drunken, but not with the postman's " whisky." There was now the sound of the waves on the beaches pulsing up to them. What a mad dusk ! What a serene, queer dusk !

Ahead loomed a moving bulk. They heard the bump and rumble of wheels in the uneven way. How, Robert wondered, had he not heard the cart of the highroad ? By the side of the cart a man was walking : Ian walking uphill. They hurried after him. He did not hear them because of the rolling of the wheels and that bumping as they dropped into hollows on the road.

" Ho-ho ! " called Mary.

Ian stopped and looked round. In that crepuscular last drizzle of daylight and encroachment of night's shadows his face was more than ever like that of the conventional Christ of art.

" It's you, Mary. Where have ye been, lass ? Oh, and you, Rab."

" We've been doon to meet ye," said Mary.

" And where were ye ? How did ye miss me ? " asked Ian.

" Oh, we walked on a bit doon the laigh road. When we got back we seen ye ahead."

" Indeed," said Ian.

He peered down at Mary as he spoke that one word.

As one can see roses in a garden in a moonlit night he could see her throat in that twilight.

"What's that ye have in the cart ahint the rams?" she asked.

"That's Mr. Dewar. Fou. I didna see him at the fair but he must have been there, I suppose, holding horses for a dram. I pickit him up at the cross-roads. He was lying there when I came along. He canna have been there long, however, seeing ye just passed down but a little whilie since."

"I expect he just managed to get to our road and then gave up at the thought of the climb," suggested Robert.

Ian said nothing, trudging on beside the cart.

Mary stretched a hand, feeling for Robert's, and found it. Their fingers linked and pressed a moment, a few steps behind.

CHAPTER X

"WE'LL need the lantern now," said Ian. "I thought I might get home without having to fash with lighting it."

He fumbled for it in the cart and having lit it—

"Wake up, Mr. Dewar. Ye're hame, Mr. Dewar," said he. "Mr. Dewar, ye're hame."

No answer.

"He's dead!" said Mary.

"Eh!" exclaimed Ian, peering. "He's not dead. What do ye say wild things like that for, lass? Here, Rab—hold the lantern for me."

Robert held it high. Something personal here for him, something jogging private thoughts. He had not had to wait till he was twenty-one to have more than an inkling of why his mother, on her deathbed, had sent him away from Serena. Auld Watty Wylie had practically told him, unaware. His father had been such as one as this—"drank a whole fleet of ships, and got

through his friends, too." Mr. Dewar was not one to have helpless dependants. He could not own a dog. The dogs, on more than one occasion, having found him helpless somewhere had come to report their discovery by canine signs and have him rescued from chill in ditch or moss-hag, though as little gratitude did he seem to have toward them as to the human helpers they brought. Memories of a father very odd at times, and of many occasions when he had to "be quiet because of papa," and of his mother come upon weeping, auld Wattie Wylie had recalled to Robert. And this incident revived all that.

"See, you hold the lamp, Mary, and let Robert lend a hand," said Ian, in difficulties, with a foot on the wheel-hub, bending into the cart. "I got him in myself, but he's heavy and——"

He let down the cart-tail and Robert, surrendering the lamp to Mary, stepped forward to assist him. Mr. Dewar smelt like a lamp.

"No' dead. Dead drunk!" said Mary, when the cart-tail dropped.

"Mind the nettles," warned Ian as they dragged out Mr. Dewar between them.

Ian grasped him by the shoulders and Robert by the legs, thinking, remembering, saying nothing. Wattie Wylie's mention of a grandfather who had been a painter had been more in his thoughts than the chatter of a father to whom whisky had been an enemy. But lurching into that narrow path, helping to carry that human burden, he saw (it was clear enough in his mind's eye to put it so) his mother in bed, laughing, stemming her tears, stretching her arms to him for a last embrace. The pity of it! The pity of it—men making a hash of life, for themselves, and others.

Mary jogged past them with skipping steps as if elated over all this. It was a distraction, an event, something out of the routine of the days. She opened the door for them, and standing aside held the lantern

high. They dropped the grunting Dewar on his bed, and Ian loosened his collar with one tug, his neck-tie with another, threw a blanket over him.

"Will I take off his boots?" asked Mary.

"Let him bide. It's no' for you to take off his boots, my lass," said Ian.

At that reply Mary looked at Ian with devotion in her eyes. They passed out. Ian shut the door and as they drew near the path's end the horse, hearing them coming, stepped on of its own accord. Behind they followed, Mary still carrying the lantern. Its divagating beams lit a projecting tuft of wild roses, a projecting sprig of hawthorn, flecks of segregated beauty, and left these behind to the enveloping darkness.

Ian took the lamp from Mary when they entered the yard where the horse stood awaiting the unharnessing. Robert was already employed on that, by feel as much as by sight. Behind him came Ian with the light.

"There's work for ye in the morning, Mary," he said over his shoulder. "There's folks coming to spend their summer holidays here, and there will be a little more preparation and redding up, whatever."

Mrs. MacCulloch had come to the door and begun in drawling accents—"And where have ye been, Miss Mary, if ye please, all this—" but hearing Ian's talk of summer visitors she let the censuring of the girl go. "Folks coming?" she said. "Was there somebody speiring at ye in Dulse for a summer cottage?"

"Aye. And they want to come to-morrow. With Agnes away there will be work for Mary, whatever; a little more redding up."

"Gang to your bed, Mary," said Mrs. MacCulloch. Mary turned away.

"Good-night, Mr. Ian," she said.

"Good-night, Mary," he replied.

"Good-night, Robert," said she.

The note of that "good-night" made Mrs. MacCulloch stiffen and remain stiff, as though she could

hear an echo of it in the farmyard for further hint of its significance. Ian, too, raised his head as though to listen, but the voice was gone. Voices cannot be retained by the ear ; they cannot be felt over ; they cannot be held up to the light and examined.

“Good-night, Mary,” said Robert, twisting round the big collar on the horse’s neck preparatory to thrusting it over its ears.

Ian, holding up the lantern to light Robert’s work, looked at the young man’s face in its radiance, meditatively.

“Who is it ?” asked Mrs. MacCulloch.

“Who is what ? Oh, the folks that are coming ? He’s a penter from Glasgow.”

“How many are there ?”

“Just the two, the penter and his wife.”

“Oh ! What are they paying ?”

“The same as the ither folk paid last year.”

“Well, I’d better go to bed. I’ll have to be up to see to the redding up for them, not but what we have got the letting end of the hoose fairly well prepared already. When will they be coming ? With the post-man ?”

“No. I put them off till afternoon, seeing Agnes wasna at hame, so’s not to bustle you.”

“Weel, I’ll awa’ in and go to bed.”

“Good-night, mither,” said Ian.

“Good-night, Mrs. MacCulloch,” said Robert.

“Uh-hu,” said Mrs. MacCulloch to both, and tapped back indoors.

Above was already the light in Mary’s room. Another flicked up in the window of Mrs. MacCulloch’s while they were getting the ram crates down and the rams uncrated.

“Did they get a prize ?” asked Robert.

But Ian was thinking of other things. So long was it before he answered, “Oh, aye—baith,” that one might consider voices, after all, in a way must linger in the air

The rams set free, and gone helter-skelter through the moor gate, Robert followed the horse into the stable. Ian hung the lantern on a hook in a rafter and sat down on the top of a pyramid of feed-sacks, with a gaze that veered from blank to piercing, watching Robert at work, coming and going, forking hay, bringing in the harness and hanging it up.

Suddenly there was Mary's voice in the doorway. She had gone up to her room but, after Mrs. MacCulloch had passed through the kitchen to hers, had come downstairs.

"Would ye like me to put a glass of milk and some bread and cheese for ye?" she asked Ian.

"Yes, lass, ye might."

"All right. Good-night, Mr. Ian."

"Good-night again," said he.

"Good-night, Mary," said Robert.

"Good-night, Rab," she answered.

Ian sat with head on chest--listening to the accent of that Rab--gently kicking the pyramid of sacks with a heel.

"She's a good lass, that," he said.

"Yes," Robert agreed.

"Aye--and an orphan," said Ian, then added, "in a manner of speaking."

"I knew she came from an orphanage," replied Robert.

"Aye, aye. Well, Robert, I never telt ye before, but maybe ye should ken. There is nothing like truth. You're auld enough to ken a lot, and being what ye are it will be but for yourself what I'm going to tell ye. I think ye'd better know that the lass--well, came into this world without a licence."

"Licence, Mr. MacCulloch?"

"Marriage licence. Neither was there one with Adam and Eve, whatever. But I think ye should ken, being thrown into proxeemity with her. Her mither was a keepit woman. I understand the faither was well-

placed and made an allowance for a while, but went to pigs and whistles and ran away to the abroad from his creditors, and then the keepit woman got Mary in an orphanage. I thought if ye kent she was a bastard, being the kind of lad ye are, ye might——” he seemed at a loss for words to convey his thoughts.

“ It makes no difference to me, Mr. MacCulloch,” said Robert, with the manner of one broad-minded and beyond visiting upon any one contempt for a parent’s error.

“ I kent it wouldna—that way,” replied Ian. “ But I thought it might make a difference anither way.” He put his cap on his knee and ran his fingers through his hair. “ Ye have a heart, Rab, and, as I say, it might make a difference another way. I’m not wanting to be what they call *soft* about this, but I aye try to be like a half-faither, or a half auld brither, to her. You and she get on fine together. I was thinking that if ye was to ken all this ye’d be minded to be as a kind of brither to her—while ye are here,” he added, just as though he had premonition that Robert would soon be going from them.

A kind of a brother to her ! Robert drew a deep breath. The thought came to him, considering what he knew of his father and what Ian had told him of Mary’s father, that for all he knew the girl might be indeed kin to him, he her half-brother, if not to be considered so legally. He stood there staring with an expression beyond MacCulloch’s fathoming. In truth it was not so. Robert’s father was not the only one to play ducks and drakes in that city of Glasgow and leave it. His story was not exceptional. But that thought in Robert’s mind gave him a feeling of fright, the kind of fright one has finding himself but a step from the edge of a precipice and the danger revealed by a merciful lightning flash.

From staring before him lost in these thoughts he turned and looked directly at Ian, and suddenly those

dreamy eyes of the man's were dreamy no more. In the midst of them something happened. It was as if a little shutter opened that was wontedly left closed, and something looked out—looked a question, probed a question, a silent question that would find an answer without speech. The shutter closed. He had had his answer.

"Aye, aye," he said. "I telt ye for the best. It's safe in your keeping."

He rose and led the way indoors with the lamp. To one end of the table was a cloth spread, and a bowl of milk waiting, and a plate of scones and cheese.

Ian walked to the hearthside and sitting down, bent to unfasten his leggings. Robert had a feeling as of having lived all this before. It was very quiet in that interior. He put thumb to latch on the door to left.

"Well, good-night, Mr. MacCulloch," he said.

"Good-night, Robert."

The door that Robert opened had the appearance, at first glance, of a cupboard door but it opened on a steep flight of stairs. He stepped up into the small room that was his, struck a match and lit the candle. Then he sat down on the bed and stared before him. The memory of Ian's searching eyes was with him. They probed again it seemed from the dusky corners of the little room. When a breeze flicked the window-curtain he started.,

In that room the young man was in touch with something too vast for him, thinking over the night. The crumbling sunset, the thunder of a sea-wind in the great chestnuts, the living warmth and firmness of Mary held in his arms as he kissed her: all that was still with him. And the memory of his mother that had come as they carried Mr. Dewar to his cottage was with him also.

Supposing that man who had *run away to the abroad from his creditors* was his father! What Ian had wondered about had not happened. But still—but

still—supposing that man . . . That Mary's surname was not Barclay meant nothing, for she would take her mother's name, of course. It couldn't be. Surely it wouldn't be. And then in his young distress he had a thought really perhaps profound for his years, which was this: that in a way all are brothers and sisters, all in one family under the cryptic talk of a wind passing in trees and the inferences of crumbling sunsets. He did not put it into words, but that was the blent thought and emotion out of it all for him.

Sitting there on the edge of his cot-bed he felt only tenderness for that bold lass, the "big lump," the participator in the strangeness of that evening with him. A great tenderness filled him for her, for everybody—everybody in the world, all the people under the stars and the sighing of winds in tree-tops.

There was a sputtering sound. It was of the candle near an end. How time made sudden jumps that night! It seemed he had but a moment ago come up the stairs and lit that candle, which had not been small then.

CHAPTER XI

THE smell of porridge cooking was in the flagged kitchen. Over the fire the big pot of it emitted plip-plops and puffs of steam from fumaroles. The porridge-pot always reminded Robert of what he had read of volcanic regions.

The black tea-caddy, with a design of yellow dragons on it, was at the end of the table near to the fire, ready for the tea-infusions when the kettle boiled. (*Masking* the tea they called it there. "Have you masked the tea?" Mrs. MacCulloch would inquire). Robert stood looking at that tea-caddy. A beam of early sunlight was on it, picking it out for delight of the eyes, brightening the gilded dragon on it.

Mary came in from the spence with a great pitcher of

creamy milk and as she passed she looked anxiously at him, then put out her plump hand and stroked his chin with the back of it. Turning abruptly he nearly said : " Don't do that ! " Queer ! Last night lying in the haystack, sharing the sunset and the cryptic sigh of the evening breeze in the broad chestnuts with her ; last night tenderness and pity for all humanity ; this morning, at a hoydenish caress, annoyed. She looked hurt at his expression.

" I'll help you, seeing Miss MacCulloch is away," he said instead of the rebuff that had sprung to his lips, and he went to the fire to blow up the flame of the peat divots and rearrange them that the air might get to them.

" Good-morning. Good-morning."

It was Ian in the doorway. He went to the ingleside and, taking up his leggings that lay there, sat down heavily to put them on. Then the old lady entered, tapping with her stick, and gave the breakfast preparations an inquisitorial and comprehensive survey. There was no cause for complaint. Mary whisked the porridge-bowls from the fireside and filled them. They sat down to eat.

Table-talk that morning was all regarding the visitors. All over the island, at that season, there would be similar considerations of ways and means for putting up extra people. The laird objected to anything like a suburbanising of Rathay. The building of seaside villas was anathema to him. At Broadrig and Dulse were a few, but when farmers tried to get permission from his steward for building the sort of houses that appeal to city people, the reply was that it simply was not worth while putting their pleas before the laird. He was adamant on that point. Farm-houses he wanted to see, not boarding houses. " We don't want to make Rathay Isle into another Rothesay," he was wont to say. Not that he objected to people of the city loving his island, but if they loved it

they must love it for what it was. They must spend their short summer vacations in the thatched houses that the people of the island lived in the year round. They must like flagged floors. To give house-room to summer visitors the farm folk made temporary bedrooms for themselves in lofts over the barns, retaining for cooking one end of their farms, and letting the other to the towns folk.

Mrs. MacCulloch's conversation was all for Mary and on the subject of napery and of blankets to be aired. Ian ate without a word, occasionally, with a secretive air, dropping morsels to the dogs. It was against his principles to feed them at table, but he had accidents with his food, deliberate accidents. They were not permitted to ask for scraps there. If they did the "accidents" would not occur. And even as they knew not to ask it is highly possible that they knew their master was but quibbling with himself and indeed, to speak by the card, feeding them at table! "The dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table . . ." He had read that in the big Bible into which he dipped at times, and had liked it, liked more than the *soond* of it, the sense, and all it suggested to him. He had dropped more crumbs after reading it. The act had, after that, the quality of a ritual, and of participation, even if he were to live but the "four-score years" (and if he lived *that* long he hoped he would not be all knotted up then with rheumatism), with something that endured. Eighteen hundred years ago one had seen the dogs eat the fallen crumbs and used that in talk.

Dreams went out of his head and—

"Well," he said at last.

He rose, and Robert rose, and they passed out to prepare sleeping places for themselves in the barn-loft, a makeshift room at the other end.

As they worked, up and down the ladder, sweeping and hammering, and carrying mattresses across, Ian

glanced often at Robert with interest. It seemed to him that the lad had suddenly grown older, taken a jump. There was a clock in the pier tower at Broadrig, the hands of which did not move continuously. They jerked ahead at the end of each minute. One could look to see the time, and think it dragged ; and even as one looked the hand would jump to the next minute mark. Robert seemed to have made a jump.

Looking at his watch Ian announced that he thought Robert should be off to Dulse for the summer visitors.

“ Broughton is the name,” he said, “ and ye’ll find them at the inn.”

It was wonderful to be a man. Half an hour later Robert was waggling in the cart on the way to Dulse—thinking of Mary. He was building castles in the air. He had dismissed as absurd that thought of possible consanguinity which, the night before, had taken hold on his imagination. Night’s imaginings and dreads seem to be wilder than those of day. In his day-dream, humped in the cart, he had a great sheep-farm, and Mary was its mistress. This farm of his day-dream had less to do with sheep and their sale, or the sale of their wool, than with the sun on heather or bracken, a knoll of the high hills with a pool lost to all knowledge but that of the sky and the shepherd, and the sound of the seas bursting, waves thrashing, far off things like that.

“ Hullo ! Where ye gaun ? ”

He had come level with the smith’s shop. It was John Reid who hailed him, that jolly farm-boy whom he preferred to Ecky MacAlpine, and with whom he often went swimming.

“ Hullo, John ! Getting a horse shod ? ” he asked, and reined in.

“ No, I’m working here now. I’m going to be a smith.” The clock-hand had jumped for John too. He had a new manner. “ I served my time with auld Duncan Campbell and I had the right to say what I would do myself. Colin Dunlop here had aye wanted

me to come with him when my time was up with Duncan Campbell."

He came out to the door, swaggering in a leather apron caught up at the side.

" You have all the tricks of the trade," said Robert, nodding at the apron and laughing.

Reid looked at him and slowly a smile spread.

" Where are ye off to ? " he asked.

" I'm going to Dulse to bring some folks who have taken the farm-end for the summer."

" Oh, maybe there will be a lassie for you among them. It's aye good to have two strings to your bow, as the saying is. I saw ye last night with Mary." Then he added with a keen, piercing gaze : " She's a good lass, yon, Rab."

" She is that," Robert agreed, and felt somewhat embarrassed by that piercing glance, also annoyed.

" See ye later," said John.

Robert had just passed the plantation beyond the smiddy when he had to draw aside to give passageway to the postman. The postman slowed down.

" Hullo, lad ! A grand day ! And hoo did ye get on last night ? "

A bantering twinkle was in the midst of the yellow eyes. Always the bantering twinkle there.

" Fine," said Robert ; and then quickly : " We were waiting for Mr. MacCulloch."

The postman twirled his whip and flicked a fly from the horse's back.

" Aye, aye," he replied. " Of course, of course. I didna say ye wasn't ! "

He and his laugh went on.

It seemed there was nothing done in secret where male and female are concerned, that was not made manifest. Robert had not been aware that people were so greatly " taken up " with the subject. A man and woman together (he put it that way instead of a lad and lass, a boy and girl) seemed to be everybody's

business. He was suddenly both serious and annoyed at the discovery. Even Ian's talk of last night—even that—in this mood he resented.

"It's nobody's business," he told the horse.

He drifted from mood to mood. Suddenly he detested the island, the island life, tending silly sheep, ploughing rocky fields. Years and years and years he would have to work to save enough money to be his own master. Or years and years he would have to work before he could be a retired land-steward. He had been pondering, it would appear, Mr. Cameron's talk of far future possibilities and it had been depressing him. What had possessed him, he wondered, to want to be a sheep-farmer? He was filled with a tremendous longing to get away, though where to go he could not think. To get away, that was all.

CHAPTER XII

INEXPICABLY, at first sight of Mr. and Mrs. Broughton he felt no uncertainty regarding their identity.

"There they are," he muttered to the horse.

This although there were many strangers to Dulse all within sight, and these two no more markedly noting the arrival of the cart than others. A Chinaman in London recognises another Celestial passing him in the Strand, say, as of his race. A Briton in Pekin has not to be informed of the nationality of one of his compatriots met in the almond-eyed throng. Robert just knew—knew—that man in the Harris tweeds. The woman with him he knew not as surely, but her also—at least slightly! At sight of them, though he had never met them before, he was more than assured of their identity.

That was the feeling, supernatural to our present understanding and therefore not reliable. That is no doubt why, despite his certainty—certainty—he did

not halt to accost them but drove on the hundred yards to the arranged meeting place, the inn. As he turned the cart there the man he had identified as Broughton came hurrying after him.

"Are you from Pebble Glen?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, I thought so. How do you do? This is my wife."

"How do you do?"

Their bags and coats and general belongings were lying in the doorway and Broughton tossed them into the cart while Robert arranged a seat for his passengers, a plank with a straw-padded sack for cushion and, that done, held the horse's head while they skipped up by the way of a wheel-hub. Then gathering the reins he put foot on a shaft, climbed up, and sat askew on a corner of the cart. A comment on the splendour of the day and an inquiry of just how many miles it was to Pebble Glen farm, and then Mr. Broughton returned, it seemed, to a conversation with his wife that had been interrupted by Robert's arrival.

"Yes," he said, "it is a great profession. It is the greatest in the world. I wish I'd been a doctor, helping stricken bodies. I think I would have made a good doctor." He was like a little boy announcing the desire to be an engine-driver. "The older I grow the less do I feel that being an artist is anything to crow about."

"Look how you show people the world," said his wife.

"Yes, those who can see it already! And they must know I don't do it half well enough. Never mind, have a smoke," and he produced a pipe, a great hooked briar.

He looked at it as if he had never seen it before, holding it with firm grasp and polishing the bowl with rubbing thumb. Then he filled and lit it. There had been an accident just before Robert's arrival, it appeared; a doctor had been hastily summoned to tend the patient, and all this was Mr. Broughton's reaction to the incident.

As a long silence followed, Robert felt it would be a courtesy to say something, play cicerone.

"That's the coastguard station down there, sir," he said. "That's the nearest place to send a telegram from Pebble Glen. The lump at the end is the lighthouse. It is all run by old navy men. The long, low whitewashed buildings."

The painter was looking elsewhere, having been caught by something else, but Robert thought he was looking for the station in the wrong direction.

"No, sir, there," and he pointed. "Blue they are really. I only said whitewashed because that's what they are."

"Yes," Broughton agreed. "Yes, there's blue there."

"I've seen the station houses much bluer than that," said Robert. "One day I came round here when the clouds were slanting up over the hills and the coast-guard houses were—er—"

"Were what?" snapped Broughton.

"Solemn blue," answered the young man who drove the cart.

Mr. Broughton took the pipe from his mouth and exhaled smoke with a puff as of a swimmer coming up after a dive.

"Solemn blue is good," said he, "not for to-day, but I've seen the hue you speak of."

Out of the tail of his eye Robert had a perplexing glimpse of Mrs. Broughton cautiously shaking her head in some private sign as of warning to her husband. He did not know that the painter, at the frailest evidence from any stranger of eyes in that stranger's head, was everlastingly hoping and looking for more, often to be disappointed, his hopes ending with struttings up and down his studio and a declaiming of: "What the hell is the use of painting when they don't see?" And she would have to explain to him that many did see, but that he imagined that somebody could who

could not, made a swan of a goose. She refused to see Robert as hopeful merely because of that "solemn blue."

Broughton fell to whistling "The Hundred Pipers," very slowly, in time with clip-a-clop of the horse's hoofs. Robert caught the rhythm, clicked to the horse, and so quickened its pace and the beat. Then he glanced at Broughton, and Mrs. Broughton laughed.

"Weel may the keel row 'is better," said Broughton. "You can whistle it slow or fast, to any tread, better than any air I know. When I was a boy I used to sit on walls and whistle it as people went past. I could make them go slower or faster. I whistled it once quick to a man who was running to catch a car, and then slow when he slackened down after he had lost it. He was quite annoyed with me. I say, this is quite a plantation here."

"Yes, sir. Just when we get through it there is a smiddy. I think you'll like the smiddy."

"Do you like it?" asked the painter.

Mrs. Broughton murmured something that sounded like "conventional . . ." and was, as a matter of fact. She was not trying to dampen her husband's ardour. She was only wanting to prevent regrets later, disappointments. Sometimes they put him off his work. Anybody thinking her, at this first glimpse, a disheartening creature would only need to have a report of Broughton's profound harangues when he found that geese were not swans to withhold that verdict upon her.

"I do," said Robert. "I like it very much."

"Why?" demanded Broughton.

It is not always easy to give explanation for the faith that is in us if we have but pondered and not talked it. Robert could not get the words.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "I mean I can't say."

They were by then beyond the plantation, and there was the smiddy standing back from the road.

"There it is. Because of that!" Robert broke out, with the evidence before him. "You just see a bit of that horse and the forge light on it, and the other bit is just part of the darkness of the inside of the smiddy. That's why I like it. And the way John Reid's leather apron sticks out stiff," he added enthusiastically.

"O my God!" moaned Mr. Broughton.

Robert looked round, startled, to discover what was wrong with him. He found the dark-eyed woman, the cautious wife, her head lowered, looking not at her husband but at him, with a frown. Was the young man driving this cart another of those who were to delight Sam and then depress him?

"Would you mind stopping a minute?" asked the painter.

As they halted, Colin Dunlop, the smith, dropping the great hoof he had held between his knees, came out.

"Under a spreading chestnut tree the village smithy stands," quoted Mrs. Broughton with a gentle acidity.

"Yes, a chestnut tree too! Look at its shadow on the wall," said Broughton. He turned to Colin. "How do you do, smith, how are you? No, no job. Just admiring your chestnut tree."

"Surely, sir. It's a grand tree. Like candles on it, I aye think."

Broughton looked at his wife quickly before he replied.

"Yes," he said. "I'll come down and see you some day if I may." And suddenly involving himself in some sort of Doric (he had a way of immersing himself in his subjects), he explained: "I'm a penter. I'm going to stop a wee whilie at the Pebble Glen farm. I'd like to put your smiddy on to canvas, ye ken."

"A pleasure, a pleasure," said the smith. "Ony time ye like, sir. Aye, there's something aboot a smiddy that takes penters—and weans," he added, grinning broadly.

"Ye'll excuse me, but there's a man coming back for this horse and I promised to see to it promptly. Ony time ye like, sir," and he retired to his work.

Robert glanced at Broughton who, understanding the inquiry in his eyes, nodded, and he drove on.

"By God, I'm going to like this place," exclaimed Broughton. "Don't you like it, Betty?"

"Yes, I think so. Yes. Very much."

"By God, I should think so. Two of them in a few miles is pretty good going."

Robert wondered what he meant by that—"Two of them in a few miles is pretty good going." But as the remark had not been made to him he did not ask for elucidation. At a steep part of the road there he stopped, slipped out and, clicking to the horse, trudged alongside.

"Would you like me to get out?" asked Mr. Broughton.

"No. It's all right on this rise. But perhaps in the lane up the glen you wouldn't mind."

One hand resting on the shaft, the other holding the lines, Robert trudged, very happy. He was glad that Ian had entrusted him with the conveyance of these visitors from Dulse. There should have been some supernatural sign. There should have been a star keeping pace with them even by day.

CHAPTER XIII

ROBERT did not divulge to Mr. Broughton his hobby of drawing. When Broughton was at work on the high moors, Robert carried lunch up to where he was painting; and it gave him great joy to "play gillie" on these occasions. Often the painter did not stop on his arrival. He was enthralled by how the man worked. And Broughton, though not put off by the lad's watching him at work, never thought to ask him if he would not like to paint himself. Robert interested him greatly but, in lack of any such direct inquiry, his spare time pleasure (which engrossed him more than swimming in

Brennan Bay, or playing quoits with old horse-shoes at the gable-end) remained unrevealed.

When the Broughtons went back to Glasgow they left a void in Rathay. "There is a tide in the affairs of men . . ." No, it is not lost sometimes when it seems lost, or there comes another tide and a high tide.

But Broughton left more than a void. He left the fag-ends of a multitude of paint tubes, the last paint not squeezed out. He left some shreds of canvas too. During the winter he and his wife remembered the lad. They sent him books. For they had once asked him if he ever read, and Robert had replied that there were no books to read there but that once he had read a lot.

"Oh, indeed. And what?"

"Everything in the room."

Broughton had glanced oddly at him at that reply.

"Everything in the room," he had repeated as if memorising it thoughtfully. "And what, pray, had God put in the room?"

"There was Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, and Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, and *Ministering Children*. I did not care very much for *Ministering Children*. Of course I had *Deadwood Dick* at school."

"*Deadwood Dick* at school is good," murmured Broughton. "A very likable youth," he remarked to his wife later, "but with a sort of lost dog look about him sometimes for all his gaiety and effervescent *joie-de-vivre*. We have certainly got to send him some books."

So down at the cross-roads during the winter there were often packets of books in the letter-box there with the sheet of tin over it that the rain drummed on. They were always illustrated books. There were one or two on Italy with pen and ink drawings. A clutter of boats, by Pennell, shouldering at the end of their painters under the wharf of a coastal town, just the bases of streets visible beyond, he pored over a long time.

But the subject did not seem to matter. It was the lines by which it was portrayed that fascinated Robert.

A long road with poplars on either side, and a string of donkeys on it with panniers on their backs, was as haunting as these boats, their shadows and the reflections.

At Christmas time the Broughtons remembered Mrs. MacCulloch with a Shetland shawl of a sort that inferred they knew her for really a great lady, and to Agnes they sent a vanity-bag such as only the laird's wife carried.

Back in his own room which he had vacated for the summer, Robert sat often long into the night beside a candle, lost among these gifts—their illustrations more than their texts—while the wet soft snow dropping from the eaves fell with intermittent plops into the yard. He forgot (granted the truth of that view) that life was a long dismal road toward a little brief pension if one were careful. To be given fatherly hints upon morality by Ian, or from John Reid that Mary was a good lass, he did not require. The world did not interfere with him for he gave it no cause, nor had desire to.

He had not heard that Gallic cry “to escape from life.” He did not introspectively fume that it was these gifts from Broughton that were the reality to him, life to him, and that sheep-farming was an aside. Yet here again were the two lives.

It was so happy a winter that to see the daisies and buttercups again flung on the fields was to be astonished at the flight of time.

Before the spring was half over, while yet the island raised to the scurrying clouds all day and all night the bleating of its lambs and dams, the painter returned. Rathay had put its spell on him and it seemed he was not to be just a summer visitor, a fair-weather friend of these acres. His wife did not accompany him but would follow if he reported climatic conditions not depressing or too “snell.”

He received a welcome as of an old friend from all. He would have liked at least a glimpse of winter there,

to see what new aspect that season gave to his summer pastorals, but a winter visit was prevented. Spring brought him. Here he was in the windy end of March as if he had not been away, painting the riffled duck-pond and the ducks' ruffled feathers.

Robert, crossing the yard toward the farm-house, halted to watch him and Ian, following, stopped behind. Broughton peered at a duck. His left thumb was hooked through the palette ; the brush was pressed to it ; he peered at the bird almost savagely as though by hypnotic glare to restrain it from waddling off. He cried : “ Quack, quack ! ” to assist in an attempt to immerse himself in that duck’s life, and then thrust the brush again at the canvas.

“ Quack, quack ! ” he grunted, and behold a wing feather. He stood back.

“ Dinner is ready,” said Ian, laughing.

Broughton was a boarder this time, sitting down to table with them all. Mrs. MacCulloch, wearing the shawl that had been sent her at Christmas (though it seemed one that should be kept in a drawer, for an occasion that would never arise) was very gracious.

“ You’ll be amused to hear that you left Robert there fired with the ambition to be a penter,” she said, in pleasant accents. “ Aye, it’s one thing to pent and another to think ye can, though. Like me when I was but a lass : I heard a great singer in Glasgow one winter. I have forgotten her name—you’d know it at once. A very big stout woman she was. And I was fired with the ambition to sing like her. Well, I soon found I might maybe get as stout but I could never sing like yon, whatever.”

“ And what were you doing in the painting line, young man ? ” Broughton inquired.

“ Painting ! ” ejaculated Agnes. “ I found him,” said she, imparting the whimsicality with no animosity at all to Robert but with a friendly amusement, “ one Sunday when I came home from the kirk, with an old

potato-peeling knife sticking bits of paint on a canvas, trying to paint Mary." She flung back her head and chuckled. "Oh, how I did laugh at him. He told me he had seen you doing that. I told him more likely scratching off some paint ye didna want."

"Maybe he canna pent," said Mary, "but he——"

Agnes frowned at her. Though servants might sit at table because of the old feudal lingering condenscensions or kindness, they should not take advantage and join in the conversation.

"Yes, my dear?" asked Broughton, turning to her. "What were ye going to say?"

"I was going to say that he could mak' a drawing. He did a skitch of the postman that I kent the moment I looked at it. I sayd: 'Oh, that's the postie!' —just like that."

"Well, that was splendid. That is more than can be done with some portraits."

"Oh, she kens nothing aboot pictures," explained Agnes MacCulloch.

Broughton changed the subject. But on the first possible occasion, coming on Robert alone mucking out the stable, he had an inquiry for him.

"What's all this," he said, "about the potato-knife?"

"Oh, that! What Miss MacCulloch said at table?"

"Yes, that."

"Well, I tried to get a brush at the shop but I couldn't. They had only whitewash brushes. Then I remembered aboot you using that palette-knife."

"Did you desist because of a little chaffing? Did you make only one attempt with the potato-knife?"

"No. I got a putty-knife. They had that at the shop and it was just like your palette-knife. Oh, but they were no good."

"Where are these daubs of yours, my son?" asked Broughton.

"Up in the barn loft."

The painter on this visit had Robert's room and Robert was again esconced across the yard.

"Lead to the loft."

Past the hay bales, up a ladder, and through a hole in the floor they mounted to the loft's extraordinary quiet. Dusky it was and the shadows among its beams were like tranquil reveries.

Broughton took the fragments of canvas that Robert conjured from behind a bin and stepping to the window sat down on a three-legged stool, a milking-stool, that stood there. He peered at the paintings.

"What on earth possessed you to do this?" he demanded.

His manner of speech was not yet plain to Robert. The "what possessed" at once suggested that it was execrable indeed. He had no immediate answer.

"What did you put this paint on with?" asked Broughton, without waiting for an answer to his first question. "This is not an old potato-knife or putty-knife example, is it?"

Robert stepped closer to him, looked over his shoulder.

"Oh, that one. That one was before I thought of the little knife. I did it with my thumb."

"My good woman," rumbled Broughton, in low key, "there is going to be no mute and inglorious Velasquez, so to speak, here."

"I beg your pardon?" said Robert, puzzled.

"Talking to my wife," explained Broughton.

Queer fellow, this painter. Not mad—Robert knew better than that. Not mad; not even odd; or not nearly as odd as lots of people round about there. He looked through the "daubs."

"Where did you get the paint?" he asked.

"You left some tubes that were not quite empty."

"Another good reason for not being parsimonious," remarked Broughton. He sat hunched on the stool,

canvases in hand. "Let's see the drawing of the postman."

"I threw that away. Miss MacCulloch said she thought it was a picture of Rathay Fell."

"Well, he is a mountain of a man," said Broughton lightly. "Any other drawings?"

"Yes, I have a few here."

Broughton moved nearer to the window. A great cloud was bellying down against the slopes outside. He looked round the room—or that cleared space to one end of the loft that served as a room by reason of a cot-bed, a stool, and square of carpet discarded from one of the farm bedrooms. He saw on a shelf some of the books he had sent the lad. There was serenity there, a sense of brooding quiet. He could hear his watch tick. Eager, wistful, puzzled, the young man seemed to him, turning back then with a sheaf of drawings that he had extracted from below the mattress.

Having looked at these Mr. Broughton sat back and played a tune on his teeth with his pipe-stem. The rain came out of that heavy cloud and pattered on the roof. Its muffled tattoo on the thatch added to the feeling of oases there, of sanctuary.

"What's the idea of your being here?" he asked.

"Sleeping in this loft?"

"No, working on this farm."

"To learn sheep-farming."

"Where do you come from? I've never asked you."

"Serena, Peru."

"Serena, Peru. The sun shines there."

"Yes, it does. I can remember the sky yet."

"Ian told me something about you. He did not mention Peru. It was just from what he called 'the abroad.' You were sent home when—er—to live with an uncle and aunt, were you not?"

"Well, I call them uncle and aunt. She was a parlour-maid with my mother before my people went to Peru."

"I see." Broughton raised his head and listened to the rain. "And these people thought to make you a sheep-farmer?"

"No. They asked me what I'd like to be and I said that."

"Why? What possessed you?"

"It was a picture I saw of sheep on the crest of a hill," said Robert earnestly.

"I see."

There was a long pause during which Broughton, his big hooked briar pipe in hand, did nothing but polish the bowl with caressing thumb, on and on, as if unaware.

"I suppose," he said at last, "you were sort of—what do you call it?—indentured to this farm, apprenticeship, or something?"

"For four years." Robert wanted to show he was practical and could answer such questions. "Board the first three years, then seven pounds a year, and then twelve. Till I had learnt about it all. The idea was to give me a start in life."

"Quite."

The rain increased in force, dancing a jocund metre on the roof.

"So your people left you some money?"

"I have a note of it all. There was enough to pay for my board with the Camerons, my school-fees and my clothes, and a little was left over. My aunt, before she went to California, gave me a note of what I had, and I know what I've spent since. It's in the bank."

"Well, you don't spend anything to speak of while you're here."

"Just clothes, and next year my wages will pay for them."

"Then you've got some of this capital that your folks left?"

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Cameron had the balance transferred to my name at the bank. There's quite a lot."

“ How much ? ”
“ Fifty pounds.”

Broughton had been sitting forward, elbows on knees. At that he bowed his head and ran a hand over his stubbly hair in a slow motion. It began at his forehead and did not end at the nape of his neck ; instead it continued slowly round, back to his jaw, and then, chin in hand, he sat looking at the floor. It was as though he were in prayer ; and he had a ray of light. He looked up.

“ You might as well be a painter as a sheep-farmer with that,” he said.

CHAPTER XIV

YESTERDAY the crying of lapwings ; to-day the cries of newspaper boys.

Robert’s life was being arranged for him. Or an emissary of destiny was arranging it for him. He had been lifted out of the Isle of Rathay. Yesterday the slapping of the waves on Brennan Head sounding dully in the farm-yard corners, echoes like impacts of air on the ear-drum, ghosts of sound ; to-day the tapping of feet confusing in their multitude. He was at that age—seventeen then—when the people passing by were all interesting to him to such a degree that he felt agony to know their lives, or that he might not, strangers all. Because of that their exteriors were fixed in his mind with the greater clarity.

He was to sleep a night or two at the Broughtons’ ; and to-day, while he made some purchases in the shops, Mr. Broughton went to Francis Raeburn’s to talk about him and make further arrangements for him.

Sam Broughton strode so quickly through the crowds that the thin vapours, creeping and clinging in the streets, whirled from him. Raeburn had a name, if not as a great painter, as a great art master. He provoked

enthusiasms. He could bring out of his pupils what capacity was in them. In appearance he was as if out of Italian opera. One expected him to clear his throat, touch his lips with a finger, and break forth in song, bassoprofondo. But instead he painted, and taught. He had intended to call his School of Art the Fra. Raeburn Atelier, had all the copy at the printer's for the prospectus when a photographer opened what he called an Atelier in the same street. And though to call a school of art an atelier (outside of France) is not as pretentious as calling a photograph-establishment so, Raeburn was not annoyed, save momentarily. He felt that the photographer had rescued him from what, outside of France, might smack of affectation. School of Art, he decided, was better, better even than Academy of Art which, as a substitute for atelier, had occurred to him next, prone as he was to a little flaunt in life, a gesture. That egregious photographer decided it. He was all for directness, simplicity : The Raeburn School of Art. But he kept the Francis as Fra. on the prospectus : "Head-master, Fra. Raeburn, R.I., R.B.A."

Broughton, creating a whirlpool in the grey fog at the door of the Raeburn school, swept into the hallway, marched to Fra's door and entered. A curtain within entangled his head, and while he was wrestling with its folds in a pose reminiscent of the Laocoön, Raeburn wheeled to discover wherefore the commotion.

Next door was a music shop, and in this room one could hear when people tried the quality of pianos there. The curtain arranged, it was in slow measure to a march that Broughton advanced upon Fra, who laughed at that entrance, highly typical of his friend.

"Somebody who can play," remarked Broughton. "What do you do when they can't?"

"Go into a students' room," replied Raeburn. He sniffed. "I can smell peat-smoke on you. Have a cigar?"

"Peat-smoke. That brings me to my cause for visiting you. Fra, I have found a painter."

"Oh, there are plenty to be found and few chosen. If I could ever be found myself more certainly I should not be running this establishment."

"Think what youth would lose then," said Broughton. "I want this find of mine to come here. He has only fifty pounds. I want to pay his fees for a year with you. He can live on the fifty, somehow."

"Can you afford it, Broughton?"

"No, I can't, but I don't give a damn. I can't tell you all his story. He must have lessons. I can't give them to him. I've to work.—I've to put my own boy through college. Anyhow, I could never give instruction as you do."

"I can put Art into no one," said Raeburn. "But I flatter myself if it's in a young man I can decent it."

"Surely. Quite. Well, look here, I don't want him to know I'm paying. I want him to think that there is some grant that lets you have free pupils. I've a notion he's as proud as the dickens. He's the herd-lad, general farm servant, called pupil, in a place I know of on the Isle of Rathay. Paint! With some tips that boy is going to do things. He's a genius. I've seen one thing he did with his thumb in lack of a brush—"

"His thumb! Well, I've seen paintings that looked as if they had been done with a great toe."

"Wait till you've seen this one—this kid's effort with his thumb."

"Show me his stuff," said Raeburn.

"I haven't brought any with me. I wanted to see you about the lie first," said Broughton, "and then send him to see you and show you his stuff."

"Bring him along. If I agree, and like the fellow, I'll pay half myself. That's that. How are things?"

"My God, Fra, that's very good of you."

"I said, how are things?"

The "things" were discussed, the anxieties of life and anxieties relieved, and then there was an aside by Broughton on his son who had recently begun to study medicine in Edinburgh—" . . . finest profession in the world, a doctor's. Glad to see my boy keen to be a doctor," a comment that made Raeburn, to whom paint was all, snort. That evidence of disagreement brought a lull which Fra ended by returning to Robert.

"By the way, what is this protégé of yours like?" he asked.

"Like? All kinds of things. Stands five feet eleven, or so; hair auburn; eyes brown. Other, and more distinguishing marks are that he looks at you as if he was asking a question, sort of lost dog look occasionally. Then he sometimes seems like a young doctor" (Raeburn cleared his throat vigorously) "with a keen, piercing stare in your eyes. He's an orphan. His father, I found out, was a Glasgow man, made ducks and drakes of it here and went abroad. Ducks and drakes of it there. His mother, on her deathbed, packed the kid home rather than leave him to the father's tender mercies, after having arranged through the consul for him to go to Carruthers' Academy."

"Father as bad as that!"

"He was in hospital with his second shot of D.T.'s when the mother was dying. I've got all this from Ewart Lang, the consul at the time. He's back in Glasgow now. It is all Scots business in Serena, where he comes from, and they naturally had a Scots consul. The mother's father was Robert Gartmore."

"Eh? Gartmore the etcher?"

"The same."

"Queer thing heredity," observed Fra Raeburn. "Good that he has inherited the art instead of the bottle craving. I wonder why that man Gartmore never did any more? Went into exile almost. It would be interesting to know all his life. Too much dreamer, I fancy. Well, bring your lost dog along and

we'll lie to him about a grant, and if I think what you think of his stuff I'll pay half."

Though the establishment bore Raeburn's name it was not entirely his. He had not the money to start it, and the members of the board behind him asked merely that it should pay dividends. They were not philanthropists.

Robert was indeed feeling very much of a lost dog that day. Among the fogged crowds he could see the farm at Pebble Glen, even to a straw on the cobbles of the yard, the hard bristle broom leaning at the door of the byre, a hen high-stepping surrounded by her brood. He saw too acutely to withdraw his mind as swiftly as his body. He could still see Mary. He saw her grin (a brave grin as she waved good-bye) turn to a baby's puckered cry. She had moved away and catching up her apron held it to her face. Here the crowd jostled, the carts rattled over cobbled streets. There Mr. MacCulloch sat on the chair by the ingleside, fastening the buckles of his leggings that he had loosened—"loused," was Mary's word—before dinner, for it was close on one o'clock.

At the appointed corner Mr. Broughton met him. They lunched (breakfast, lunch, dinner it was here, not breakfast, dinner, supper as at Pebble Glen) in a long low dusky room where the shadows of hurrying waiters accompanied them in duplicate all the time, in triplicate often from the overhead lights and the wan daylight coming in at the windows.

Over lunch Broughton explained that he had made inquiries regarding the grant of free tuition at the Raeburn School, and that it depended upon what promise Raeburn found in specimen work.

Fra was reported still at lunch when they entered the school, but he had left word, the secretary said, that they were to go to his room and wait for him there. For the second time in his life Robert had a sense of acquaintanceship with what he did not know. As he

had recognised Broughton at first slight, so did he know this room. The trepidation was allayed that he had felt on hearing that by the specimens of his work which he had to show would the decision be made whether or no he might enter the school under the terms of its grant. This was his room. No rooms he had ever seen before had been his as this one was. Low on the wall where he sat near the fire was a drawing of a foot, just a foot (indeed of only a part of a foot), a trickle of veins over an instep. A prize-winning study, that, of some star pupil who had gone on to other things, and it was part of the quietness of that room.

Broughton lay back in a chair beside the table and thought, slowly filling his pipe, slowly smoking. Robert looked round. To the other side of the fireplace was a drawing of a hand. It was not in the middle of the frame, he noticed ; in fact it was high up, and below was just the paper, the paper it was done on. Even that space of paper was beautiful. "School of Art drawings," these, as they say, but they were worth keeping there.

The door opened, the curtain rings tinkled, and Broughton rose. The man who came in looked from one to the other and Robert wondered what it was that made them seem similar, Mr. Broughton and this big, dark man—they were so unalike ! Broughton was tall ; so was Raeburn ; but there it ended. Broughton had close-cropped fair hair ; Raeburn had dark locks sweeping over his dark brow. Broughton was effervescent ; Raeburn was reserved, at least at that audience, with a reserve near pompous. What made them alike might be explained later.

"Here is the young man I told you about," said Broughton.

"Well, young man," said Raeburn, and shook hands with him. "You want to avail yourself of the grant and have tuition here, eh ? "

" Excellently carried off," thought Broughton. " A born liar ! "

" Mr. Broughton told me of it, sir."

" These your drawings in this packet ? " asked Raeburn, and taking it from Robert with a flick undid the running loop.

He began at the top and looked at them from first to last with no expression that could advertise his thoughts. In fact glanced were a better word than looked. He tossed them on the table as one dealing cards. Broughton, standing back a few paces, hands on hips, watched him, his eyelids puckered.

Robert did not once move his gaze from that dark mask. The pack of paintings (or daubs) and drawings thus rifled over, Raeburn walked to the far wall and very carefully straightened a picture that his eye had seen as hanging askew an insignificant fraction. He strolled back to the table, rifled through the drawings and paintings (or daubs) again, selected two for further scrutiny, looked at one an appreciable moment, said, " Huh ! " and threw it down.

" I had to do that one with my thumb, sir," explained Robert, apologetic. " I could get no brush, and I did not think then of buying a putty-knife."

Raeburn was looking at the other he had selected and it was as though he had not heard that explanation regarding the first. It was an attempt at Mary.

" Flesh ! " he exclaimed, shouted in fact.

Robert did not understand. He thought the remark was in the nature of Miss MacCulloch's " big lump." Raeburn held it up toward Broughton.

" Flesh ! " he bellowed.

" Uh-hu ! " said Broughton.

Raeburn handed the lot back to Robert, jabbing at him the paper and string as sign that he could wrap them up ; and while Robert was doing so Fra walked slowly to and fro, hands behind back, looking at the

carpet. When he passed Broughton he said something that Robert did not catch :

“ I’ll pay the other half.”

That’s what Raeburn said, and Robert did not catch. He wondered what this great dark man thought of the specimens. He awaited the verdict feeling like the condemned in the French Revolution awaiting the calling of their numbers to go to the guillotine. Fra halted in his parade, saw some matter out of place on his coat-sleeve, a crumb, a thread, invisible to the others, flicked it off. And then——

“ Well,” said the great man, wheeling on him, “ come as soon as you like. Ask for Mr. Crosby. He will know about you. I’ll see you sometimes.”

“ We’ll go,” said Broughton.

“ All right, Sam. See you later.”

Raeburn walked with them to the door of his room, passed into the hall with them and then abruptly turned away with a mere sidelong glance at Robert.

“ Do you think he saw anything in them at all hopeful ? ” Robert asked when he and Broughton were in the street together. He had the impression that he had been allowed to avail himself of the free tuition at the school simply because Mr. Broughton was a friend of the headmaster.

“ Yes, I think so. He would not have been so pleased about you going to study there if he had not liked them.”

“ I didn’t notice that he was pleased.”

“ Oh, he was. I know him. I know when he’s pleased.”

CHAPTER XV

THE shaping went on toward unknown, unpredictable ends, some might hazard for no ends at all, sheep to be mutton (as Mary had regretted, observing what

intelligence even sheep could attain), men to be mummies at best.

The constant endeavour of Fra Raeburn was to cause those in that building see. To see—wherever one was going, somewhere or nowhere—to see, that was his grand passion. What gulfs there were between him and the Rector of Carruthers'! The word "school" had almost frightened Robert. He would have had less dread of atelier. Yet once there, all was well. It seemed inconceivable that in the same city could be places of instruction so different in spirit as Carruthers' and this. Worlds within the world, indeed. Work there was in the Raeburn School of Art a little too much, for Robert's taste, like the drawing lessons at Carruthers'. He was set down by Mr. Crosby, to begin with, before a plaster cast, a scroll of leaves in bas-relief, and told to do it in pencil, then to do it in wash, then to do it again. But on the third afternoon the great man, upon his rounds, paused beside him. The lost dog look of this pupil had touched Fra. He had been at a lunch, and had had a glass or two of wine, and the sentimentalist in him was alert.

"Broughton says he's had a queer time," he thought, "and he can certainly see flesh. Plaster casts of whirligigs may bore him."

Aloud he asked: "You are not exactly enraptured and consumed with interest over that, are you?"

"No, sir."

"And your reason?"

"It reminds me of having to draw half-vases at school."

"I know these drawings. It's association that is bothering you. Discipline has its merits, but there are occasions . . . here, come along with me."

He led the way into the corridor. He passed to another room where students were standing at work before easels among figures of plaster, instead of sitting at little tables facing plaster scrolls. A Hermes poised

here with the winged foot raised. The shadows of the wings on his hat were like leaves. The folds of the garment of the Venus of Melos all but rustled.

"How do you like that woman with the helmet on her head and the visor up?"

"Very much, sir."

"Lovely thing," said Fra.

But Robert was looking elsewhere.

"Prefer the Winged Victory, eh?" asked Raeburn. "All right. Imagine she's alive. Go to her. And don't look at how anybody else draws. Get her down any way you like, but get her down. Get her down with your thumb rubbed on the charcoal if you like, but get her down as you see her. This is a good place to stand. Like this view of her? All right."

The great man marched over to the end of the room and was carrying an easel to the selected spot before Robert realised what he was about. But Raeburn set it up and then, producing a fragment of charcoal from his waistcoat pocket stooped and made a mark on the floor where the easel stood.

"What is your name, again?" he asked.

"Barclay. Robert Barclay."

"Of course, of course."

He signed the name for Robert on the floor beside the marks, muttering: "Commit a forgery for you." Not that he had really forgotten the name. He had unbent; and lest he had unbent too much he ostensibly forgot the name. Good men (he called them all men, whatever their years) most of these students, but he believed in having an air with them. Robert, of course, adored him.

Over the mantelpiece in his humble lodgings in a street toward Maryhill, Robert had for centre-piece a charcoal sketch from memory of the great Fra, a very different thing from the drawing of the Rector of Carruthers' that Wee Grant, admiring, had wiped out for his protection, instead of reporting toward the end

of a flogging as most of the other masters in that purgatory of youth would have done.

In these lodgings (or that lodging, a "bed-sitting-room" in the phrase of the advertisement) he was fed on porridge and skim milk, eggs boiled, scrambled, fried and, for a further variant, fried on both sides, and an occasional omelet—but it often happened that what in the inception was omelet had by accident become scrambled eggs—also on sausages and mashed potatoes, stewed prunes, and tapioca puddings. Often he did not know what he ate for the joy of life and vision. Ten shillings a week in those distant days was the cost for room and board. For all this, of course, was long before the war of 1914-1918. There were then horse-cars on the streets. Then people were diffident, embarrassed, felt foolish talking into telephones when they had been prevailed upon to have them installed in their homes.

Carruthers' Academy, it will be remembered, had no Old Boys' Day, no old pupils' reunion. The Raeburn School of Art did not need to have an old students' day. Students came back from time to time as the spirit moved them, just walked into the rooms, walked up to the master present, shook hands, and then moved round looking for the remaining friends of their period. These visitors gave hints of worlds beyond to Robert. There was one who came from Paris. He was studying at Mery's (Mercell Méry Bertheret's) whither he had gone on a scholarship won here. There was another of these former students who had won a travelling scholarship and chosen Italy.

Much of his talk, spoken to a pupil whose years at the school overlapped his, Robert could not but overhear from where he stood at work. He caught the name Anticoli-Corrado. ". . . stick wild roses in their hats . . . the streets all stairs, up and down hill . . ." he caught. In Sunday school the streets of the New Jerusalem are of jasper and chalcedony. Poets toy with

the sound of a place they might, visiting it some day, not care for, mephitic of odour—Samarcand or Bokhara. Not that Robert desired any promised land. He was happy here. He was doing a wash of the Venus of Melos : that was enough for his present. But he heard the traveller who had returned telling of Anticoli-Corrado where the mountains, the Appenines, were of blue silk, though they never shook in the winds.

Other news he brought. Returning from Italy he had dropped in on one of the former Raeburn students then in Paris, and they had had to lay hands upon a gendarme who protested at the festivities celebrating their reunion, and tie him to a lamp-post. Painting greeny-blue coats of Italian peasants, and Appenines of silk, and trussing up policemen on the way back in Paris, all blent as part of youth's young dream. As he talked this young man kept glancing at Robert's easel. His voice dropped to a whisper. A whisper replied. And then Robert's neighbour said :

“ I want to introduce Robert Fairly, Robert Barclay. Two Roberts. Two bob, so to speak. Almost half-a-crown.”

“ How do you do ? Raeburn doesn't have to tell you he's not here to put art into you, but to bring it out,” said Fairly.

Robert blushed.

“ I wish you'd join us at lunch,” Fairly added.

There were too many lunches. A lunch as guest incurred a lunch as host. There were raids on that fifty pounds. No remoteness here. Robert had found his kind at last. But he received a shock when, one day, he looked really carefully instead of casually at his bank-book. Lunches, he decided, must be eaten at home, not in restaurants. And as for glasses of beer after class : some might allow others always to stand treat but not the majority, and Robert was with the majority there. To be impoverished and hospitable is agonising. He suffered that agony.

Thus it was that eventually he would disappear at the preliminary indications of a suggestion to "come across the street and have a barge and a glass before we go home." He would vanish, steal back to that little room out by the New City Road and find it very quiet—with the same quiet as that of the room at Pollok Street through the windows of which he had watched the other children play, and hope the fellows would not think him mean and unsociable. He would sit over "sausages and mashed" in that little room, the cries of the street outside, and hints of a West Highland sunset beyond the city (the sunsets of the Isle of Rathay seen through factory smoke), with thoughts of the travellers who returned and took to him as he to them, and of the whetting fragments of their talk that he had heard, and of the students of his own period full of enthusiasm and conviviality, perhaps even then over a tankard of beer discussing their art and its technique. And then his landlady would bring in the stewed prunes.

Too far ahead he dared not calculate. He knew that at end of all his calculations there would be the evidence of need for retrenchment. Board and lodging is not all. There is raiment. He was wearing now, every day, what had been called his *best suit*, as though he had more than two. He was wearing, that is to say, what had once been his better suit and now was his only suit. And in shop-windows he saw volumes of engravings costing his board and lodging for a year. In the old public library he could see such books also, and did. His best suit, his better suit, his only suit, was not yet so threadbare as to cause him to be evil-eyed by the commissionaires at the doors of the picture galleries that were privately owned, so he could possess, as long as he was in the Rathbone Gallery, Martin Moir's *Match-Seller*, or his *Orators* (that group of debators on the Glasgow Green), exhibited there, or his *Clutha Number One*. Richard Grey's *Flowing Tide on*

the Irvine Shore he saw in another such gallery in St. Vincent Street, and his *Roofs of Irvine*. There was something about these roofs that made him think of a flock of sheep on a bleak day of wind huddled together for warmth. He smelt oatcakes. He heard the kettle drowsily purring in the farm-kitchen at Pebble Glen, all that while sitting on a divan in that gallery in St. Vincent Street, looking at a picture.

As the year wore on he had a letter from Ian MacCulloch giving him the winter's news. They all hoped, in Pebble Glen, that he would come down in the summer to spend his holidays there. Mr. Dewar had gone. Many a time had one of the dogs come home to lead them to where he was lying, and they had followed the dog and carried him to his cottage. Agnes, Ian mentioned, had been "real indignant because of the way he had done with the dogs." They were not on the farm to look after drouths, she said, and often he would take one with him—the old one that had most often rescued him. He had been very rude to her when she spoke to him about it. She had seen him kick the dog, and so had said that it was a poor return to a dog that had saved his life upon more than one occasion; and he had replied by rudely telling her what she could do with the dog. It was strange to think that Mr. Dewar's father was gentry and he born gentry.

In the back end of January, Ian reported, the dog that Mr. Dewar had practically made his own then had come home late and pawed at the door. It was a fearsome night, and that cold that it went into the back-bone, but the dog was fair determined. So up got Ian and went forth after it. Mr. Dewar had evidently been taking a short cut over the hills from Dulse. In winter it was a poor short cut, what with the drifts and all. By the time they got to him he was dead, and the tobacco he was chewing was a black piece of ice on the side of his mouth, and it open.

There would be visitors in the half-farm in summer,

the letter went on, but Robert could have the dead man's little house, Mrs. MacCulloch bade Ian say. It was all redd up. But indeed if he would prefer it, and maybe he would, there was always a bed could be put up in the barn loft. But that, indeed and whatever, could be settled upon when he arrived.

There was much in that letter to take Robert's thoughts back to Rathay. He read between the lines. Ian, he felt, was averse to offering him Mr. Dewar's house to sleep in though conveying his mother's suggestion. Ian could be moved by associations. To the MacCulloch women-folk the only reason for disliking a house would be that some "smittle sickness" had been in it.

Whether on arrival there in summer he would sleep in that little cottage or in the barn was not worth pondering for the simple reason that he could not go to Rathay in the summer. His best resolves of retrenchment had failed. He had accepted lunches on the impulse of his kinship with those who gave them, and had made the return of other lunches. He had not always been able to efface himself, disappear, when adjournments had been made after class to certain little private rear rooms at the back of certain little "pubs."

One day, near the end of term, as he walked down Union Street he saw a card in the window of a cab and carriage hiring office which read: "Wanted, temporary clerk for the summer months." He entered to make inquiries. Temporary clerks had to be taken more or less on trust. Their stated reasons for being willing to be temporary clerks were often dubious. But Robert's was simplicity itself. He explained that he was studying at the Raeburn Art School and wanted work during the summer vacation to help him along. To the manager of this cab and carriage hiring emporium this smacked of the days of the poke of meal that students brought to Glasgow College. Here was

no tippling clerk who could not keep a job for long by reason of a crooking elbow.

He was engaged without long parley to take up his duties on the first of July. Twenty-five shillings a week for eight weeks: ten pounds. Board and lodging for eight weeks, four pounds. At the end of two months he would have retrieved six pounds of lost fortune. Any element of tragedy in having to make such trivial calculations did not occur to him in the elation of finding that the sum of his labours was the sum of his excess deficit. It made it seem as if there was a divine plan in life.

Robert had not for some months seen Broughton, for he, after many ups and downs, was away portrait painting. But one day, up in Glasgow on business, he dropped in to see Robert, hear his news, and gaily communicate his own. He was staying down on Clydeside, it appeared, painting a city magnate in his country house. He was pleased himself with the portrait's progress, so was Mrs. Broughton (who was a guest at the house with her husband), so was the magnate's wife. Her chief pleasure in the thing, Broughton had to relate to Robert, was this: he had actually noticed that the fur collar of the magnate's coat (in this fur collared coat he wished to be painted) was a little worn on the left side; and that mark of wear, she explained to all who were permitted to see the picture before completion, was due to his habit when addressing board meetings of standing with his head askew and his chin tucked back gently rubbing on the collar there.

"So everybody is satisfied with its progress," said Broughton. "Each from his or her own point of view is delighted. By the way, there is a little bit of the Firth of Clyde visible behind him through the window."

Robert was tremendously flattered by being made recipient of that report which was as between members of the one guild. He was not just Broughton's discovery

and protégé but as a fellow artist who could share the fine shades of such an anecdote, airily narrated. Broughton's visit elated him, put him in the mood for skipping on and off the kerbs instead of stepping on and off, on his way to the cab-office.

People hired cabs for wedding feasts, hearses for funerals ; there were tears at marriages as well as laughter ; there was decorously hid buoyancy at some funerals at least. Queer, interesting world. There were characters coming in and out all day long. There was a little grand fellow in a top hat who hung to the door to regain balance after entering, the floor, by the evidence, oscillating for him, and then, the approach to the desk ponderously achieved, grandiosely inquiring :

“ Am I right in taking it for granted that the cabriolet I observe at the door is for the funeral cortège of my dear late and lamented grandmother ? ”

Lives, lives. They came tilting in at that door, in and out, and left their faces where he kept faces—somewhere behind the retina in a private gallery. Where were they all going ? What was it all for ? Wondering about people he watched them, noted their eyes, not only the colour of their eyes but what looked out, if anything. He saw some, the gleams on whose faces were not made by the light on them alone, it seemed, mere reflection of the day's light, but by a radiance within.

CHAPTER XVI

“ WELL, it's a damned shame ! ”

It was Fra Raeburn who spoke, and he was standing with his back to the fire in his own sanctum while Robert, the student, was sitting by request in a big chair facing him.

Robert had made a discovery. The clue came from

a syllabus and prospectus of the Raeburn School of Art that had been issued. He had discovered that free tuition at that seminary was a fiction. How were his fees paid? Who was paying them? The secret was out. His profuse thanks had been given; but he could not continue on these terms.

"Where did you learn to object to—I suppose you'd say charity?"

"Oh, I can't take it, sir."

"Fiddlesticks! Look here, now, one more year. I'm sure Broughton would love to do it. And then you try for the Apsley Travelling Scholarship. It's really a bursary. There is a money attachment."

"But supposing I did not win it?"

"Oh, dear! Look at the fun you'd have trying to, and how much better you would have learnt to draw by then."

"I wonder if I could get some work to do by day and come to evening classes," said Robert, still thinking on his own lines. "I wonder if I can draw well enough to do pictures for jokes for some of the papers."

"Hawk them round, send them out, get 'em back, wait for cheques," growled Raeburn. "Board and lodgings to pay, clothes to buy. It's a damned shame. And there are young whipper-snappers in this city who don't know what to do with the money they have. Play games. Golf. Go up to the Highlands and get men to frighten grouse over their heads to shoot at out of turf boxes where they sit half soused with champagne. And if they happen to hear you extol the beauty of a line they mock you, and you have to punch their heads. Every artist ought to be able to box so as to punch the heads of mocking Philistines. Do you box?"

"I can wrestle a bit. I used to wrestle quite a lot in the Isle of Rathay with a farm-boy who's working as a blacksmith now," said Robert, and laughed.

But Fra seemed to have forgotten about boxing and

its substitute—wrestling. He was staring before him, puckering his lips.

“ It’s a damned shame ! ” he repeated.

He walked slowly to and fro in the room, his tread easy as a panther’s, big man though he was. Had he possessed a tail it would have been slowly lashing then. There was no sound on the heavy carpet. He came to a halt at the table. His eyes were not focused at it but by his gaze it might have been transparent and he looking through it. Suddenly they focused. He stooped and stared at a newspaper lying there. He took it up. He became engrossed. Then he turned to Robert.

“ Funny I should see this just now,” he said, and handed the paper to him.

He indicated a paragraph with a jab of a forefinger and Robert read : “ Wanted, draughtsman for newspaper work, photographs done in line, clay blocks, no half tone. Apply Box . . . ”

“ You could do that,” said Raeburn, “ but for God’s sake see that they offer wages worth having.”

“ If I get it, sir, I shall pay you and Mr. Broughton back——”

“ O hell ! ” said Raeburn. “ If you get it, all right. Then you can pay me back, and pay Sam Broughton back, and insult us by offering interest——”

He laid a hand on Robert’s shoulder (Robert having risen to read the advertisement) and drew the young man to him almost in an embrace. He had a Latin look ; Latin peoples do such things.

“ You won’t be lost,” he said. “ You won’t be lost ; I can’t believe that. But feeling as you do you’d better follow your own feelings. But you won’t be lost. You are going somewhere. You are travelling.”

Fra Raeburn had a way of saying not only words that sink in, but words that are dynamic and helpful. “ You are going somewhere. You are travelling.” These would be remembered. Need there might be for

remembering. For Robert got that position—newspaper work, of sorts, “photographs done in line, clay blocks.”

Because he loved the beauty of the world he sat on a high stool before a sloping desk doing pen and ink drawings of aldermen with bushy whiskers, or posters for the serial stories, posters showing undertakers in black coats and red ties digging up graves by the light of a lantern held in the hand of a masked woman whose other hand held a dagger or a revolver—things like that. The hours of work, from noon till he had finished his last drawing under the great fan of gas-light above the desk, prevented the fruition of one hope that he had mentioned to Raeburn, namely work for wages by day and work at the school in evening classes.

It seemed his adolescence had been left behind long since. They were men, in the Raeburn School (all men—“you men”—to Raeburn, though young), with enthusiasms that none called presumptuous, enthusiasms fostered, not dampened. A student was not considered conceited if he longed to be able to paint portraits like Reynolds, or landscapes and the light of heaven like Claude Lorraine or Corot, or to etch like Méryon, Zorn—or Helleu. Where Robert did task work these names were unknown to most, and had he mentioned them it would have been a great joke that this young hack draughtsman in the “studio” had such heroes. It was not a place of encouragement; and those who decreed its tone were unshakably certain that they knew “what the public wants.”

One dark night, out of the grime of the streets, sick of making line drawings and clay blocks of the arrested and the witnesses (and, if he put anything of the sort that he knew Raeburn would have thought a redeeming quality into his work, of being told: “That won’t do for us”), Robert was suddenly inveigled by the lit windows of a “pub.” To call it an inn or tavern would be to match the Strand influence of the man who had

inquiries to make regarding the cabriolet for a funeral cortège.

His father's son very much it was, no doubt, who put hand to the brass handle of the door and swung it open. "Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world," was the spirit of that, that impulse. He entered the drinking den. It was a warm interior and is if waiting for him a girl in one of the alcoves raised her head sidewise and blinked her eyelids invitingly. He returned her glance and she held up an empty tumbler to him. The thing was accomplished with unimaginable ease.

Robert sat down beside her and ordered two glasses of beer. She clicked her glass to his with no embarrassment. They were as old friends. "This won't do," as verdict upon what he knew was his best work, and "This is more like the stuff," for what he knew as his worst, were forgotten.

"I've seen you before," she said.

He had no recollection of having seen her though she was the quintessence of a type. Only in that way had he seen her before. She laid a hand on his knee and asked for a cigarette with her beer. Conversation? Unrecorded. The weather, possibly. Even in talk of weather eyes can be languorous and lips inviting. Or perhaps it was on the theme that there was nothing for a body to do.

"What o'clock is't?" she asked, and he having told her: "We'd be in time for the second hoose at the music hall," said she.

"All right."

Yes, she was a beauty in her way. These were chiselled features. She had a laugh, over anything or nothing, relieved from her boredom by sexual excitation. He saw a sadness at the eye-corners, the noting of which might give a queer twist to the affair if that night were not to be the end of it.

She rose and swept from the alcove after him with a lithe movement and a whirl of her skirts. There was a

request for chocolates on the way to the music hall, promptly complied with. That music hall was somewhat of a den. They were shown to seats whence they viewed, to the odour of oranges and the sound of cracked nuts, knockabout artistes and heard singers bad and indifferent. Somewhere in the centre of the theatre were two women who laughed hysterically over the comedian with the sausage and people began to snarl about them, and finally one called : " Have ye never been to a music hall before ? "—evidently considering that pleasure had to be taken, if not sadly, with less hysterical outbursts of laughter.

Somehow that remark was the funniest thing in the evening for Robert. And rapprochement was granted on coming out by this girl commenting on it :

" It's funny, when you think o't, that folks should object to laughter in a comic turn. They ower-did the laughing, I suppose."

" What's your name ? " he asked.

" Call me Mary," said she.

Mary ! He walked by her side in the dispersing crowd, thinking of the Isle of Rathay and suddenly very sick at heart.

" Ye'd better see me hame," she said. " Take my arm. Ye deserve some consolation on a night like this. It's a weary world whiles."

He glanced at her with renewed interest, and those eyes of her had the skill to launch darts.

" Have some of your ain chocolates," she commanded, holding out the box and laughing.

She pressed his arm to her side. He could feel her heart-beats against it.

" What's your business ? " she asked.

" God knows," he replied. " I'm called an artist. I draw for a newspaper."

" Ye're on the papers. I thought ye were something like that. What makes ye say God kens ? "

" Oh, you wouldn't understand."

" Do ye think I'm mentally deficient ? " she asked.

" Not at all ; but I said that because the things that are driving me dotty are things that perhaps you have not come in contact with."

" Oh, maybe no' " she agreed, " but I ken most folks want to be doing something else than putting the tops on marmalade jars, on and on. Ye'll be doing something like that yourself, I suppose, in your ain line, by the way ye said ' God kens. ' "

" Is that what you do ? "

" Aye, and it gets wearisome. What's exactly wearying you ? "

" Putting tops on jam jars," said he.

" So to speak." she responded.

In its way there was in all that evidence of some fellow feeling, some bridging of what a poet called the echoing straits between enisled lives.

She stopped.

" Well, this is where I bide," she said. " I'll say good-night."

She drew herself up before him, a slim piece of grace. She swept her frock round her with that gesture he had remarked earlier. A street lamp by which they had stopped flung the shadow of her hat over her cheek-bones and exquisitely modelled nose. He stood looking at her thoughtfully. He held out his hand

" Good-night," he said.

" Ye can kiss me if ye like."

It was a sad face then under that lamp. The street was empty of all save a cat undulating furtively across it. He bent forward and kissed her on the cheek, and at that touch of it kissed her ardently again and again.

" I'll maybe see ye some other night when ye dinna ken what to do with yourself," said she and turned away. Then she looked back. " I'll be taking a daunder no doubt, the morn's night, near the pub where I met you. I might even be in there."

She gave him a pensive look but as he had no immediate reply to that she moved away with a backward wave of one slender hand as she gathered her skirt before her with the other.

Robert stood looking after her. A lissome creature. She stepped like a doe, one hand before her holding the folds of her dress so that it swayed to and fro as she walked. He went home feeling greatly elated, but as he entered his room he remembered suddenly : " You are going somewhere. You are travelling." No, he had gone down a side-turning. He should have pocketed his pride, he told himself, and let Fra and Broughton pay his fees another year at the Art School.

He had tried to do his task-work well and had been baffled. He had laughed at it and done it tongue in cheek. Any intrusion of what, to him, was a saving grace in the manufacture of these things his masters demanded was promptly objected to by them as—" not what the public wants." They knew art when they saw it, as something to eliminate. The posters of Stenlen, of the Beggarstaff Brothers, of Brangwyn, then beginning to appear on hoardings, were to them perfect examples of the sort of thing to avoid, to eschew. Yes, he raged to himself, they knew art when they saw it—to abjure it.

He walked to and fro in his room, pacing, pacing. Somehow the vagaries of Paris, at least in books of Bohemian life there, seemed different from those of the north, and cocottes subtly different from factory girls. Odd that her voice was not what he thought of that night, treading to and fro, to and fro in his room with an occasional foolish laugh at himself. He pondered her grace in gestures. He thought of the fragility of that face so beautifully modelled. Yes, a fragile beauty, he thought, and then had an afterthought : due to under-feeding, perhaps. But her voice was yet to have an effect for him, as if kindling a light in gulfs of darkness.

CHAPTER XVII

"THE morn's night" came, and an end of clay blocks.

Tedium, nausea arising from application to what is worse than uncongenial labour may be distressful in the extreme. There are tasks accursed that make the whole spirit cry for occupation elsewhere. Without going so far as to link all emotion with sex emotions as do some, to-day, who have a certain sort of bee in their bonnets, it may be at least postulated that distress over clay blocks and "hellish posters" (as Robert had come to call the perpetrations desired by those who paid him wages) had its connection with the stir that sent him strolling that night toward Argyle Street.

At the corner by the library—Miller Street corner—he hesitated. Should he go there instead? He felt in a pocket for a coin.

"Heads the library," he said to himself, drew forth the penny, looked at it under a lamp.

It was heads. He put it back in his pocket and instead of going to the library went on down Argyle Street. It had appeared he only wanted the backing of the coin as one asking advice may really wish less advice than confirmation of a decision. He rejected the coin's advice.

She was waiting for him and, greetings over, led the way, peeping in at one of her haunts and passing it, leading on to another and into it. She was at ease with him that night. The evening before, though there had been ease, there had also been constraint. This second meeting was as though of old friends, and she did not tarry there long. A glass of beer drained—

"Come on," she said, caught her skirts and whirled away.

They swung off in step and took a turning into a narrow and crooked street. Even at that late hour children played there, or sat in entries, sleepy. She

evaded a group of these at the entrance to a tall warren.

"Poor kiddies, gi'e them each a penny," she said, and he did as he was told.

Cold frog-like hands he touched. Old young eyes looked up at him. She passed to the entry's end and crossing a space of flags beyond, some inner court that smelt of cats, led on into another entry. She fumbled ahead on the unlit stairs, feeling for the steps, one hand groping on the wall, one hand behind to guide him. Their fingers locked. When his free hand encountered the wall he wiped moisture from it. Dankness was on these stairs. On a dark landing she paused and sighed.

"I'm feart coming here," she whispered. "Aye, I think this is the landing. Gang quietly."

They tiptoed along a corridor with no more guidance than the dim light in a keyhole at its end. She tapped secretly and the door opened, showing a dim and unkempt interior candle-lit, the gas-bill belike not having been paid. Robert clutched to himself a recollection of reading of Turner's disappearances in London to such stews.

The woman who admitted them had but one eye. She grinned with a lecherous pleasure.

"Ye have brought a gentleman," said she. The door was shut and they stood pat, the unkempt woman bobbing and grinning at Robert. "Aye, *he's* oot at the night work. There ye are."

She nodded to a door and this Mary opened. Robert followed, but the girl halted.

"Gi'e her a couple of shillings—half-a-crown if ye like. She'll cry ye prince if ye gi'e her half-a-crown."

Robert turned and slipped half-a-crown into the hag's hand. She nodded, and winked at him with her one winkleable eye. She clapped the back of his hand. She did not call him prince but she said: "God bless ye, laddie." He realised these people were amoral.

They were a little in advance of their time. To be sure Nature had her say and diseases due to their amorality cropped up among them, but they accepted these as incidental to the free life.

In the doorway this Mary was looking round at the disbursement and its reception. She gave an indication of her head for him to follow and, closing the door, whispered an explanation.

“ Yon auld wife, if she starts crackin’, will tell ye the whole family history and all about everything, even to her chilblains.”

There was little in the room but the bed, a small table with a ewer and basin on it, and a cracked mirror on the wall behind. At once Mary used the mirror, taking off her hat and producing a comb. As she arranged her hair the light of a low-turned lamp in a wall-bracket rippled through it.

Robert stood still, looking at her. Yes, a beauty. Something of the pathetic in her face there was too—which he did not allow to touch him too deeply then. A strange fragility there. Taking off her hat brought her nearer to him. Combing her hair, shaking her head—that brought her nearer. Here might not be the relief, the distraction from more than uncongenial labour that he wanted, but if not it was a substitute.

An hour later, or so, she was combing her hair again and glancing round tenderly at him. Then she sat back on the bed, hat in hand.

“ I suppose we’ll have to be going,” she said, but did not put on her hat.

She pulled him down so that he sat beside her, drew his head to her breast, and began to sing. It was a low, plaintive singing. Husky was her voice, the voice of the people; and he was smitten with a sense of the transience of life, the pathos of loving, meetings, partings, the pity of the tumult of affections, of lust even, and a crumbling of dust at the end.

Mary stopped singing, rumpled his hair with a quick,

caressing hand, then rose abruptly and looked searchingly at him.

"Puir laddie," she said inexplicably, as if he were years younger than she. "Feeling happier now?"

He did not answer and a sound made her start, deflected her gaze.

"Oh, that did frighten me!" she said, cupping one long-fingered hand to her heart.

It was a sound of sudden rain on the sloping skylight window of that room away up at the top of the warren of a tenement, a gale sweeping there over the city roofs as it would be sweeping and driving, no doubt, on the tall scarps of Rathay Fell in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII

ROBERT was once more in that room to left of the entrance-way at the Raeburn School of Art. The secretary had told him to go in and take a seat. As a matter of fact he walked to and fro, sat down, walked again. It was good to be back there if but for a glimpse. That lovely foot with the trickle of veins over the instep held him at last in his chair an appreciable length of time. To see it again was as a home-coming.

The door opened and Fra entered. Robert rose.

"Well, young man? How are you? You look, if I may say so, somewhat *distrait*—no, distraught. *Distrait* is different. How goes the independence?"

"The independence has broken down, sir, or at least I have left that place. I've been there ten months and I can stand no more."

"Oh?"

"It will be all right. I did not come about that."

"I've no doubt it will be all right," said Fra, awaiting explanation.

"I came to ask your opinion on this," said Robert, and loosened the string round a parcel he carried.

He produced a picture and held it before Raeburn. Fra looked at it and at once at him, sharply.

" Set it up against the back of that chair," said he. Robert set it up.

The big man sat down, hands locked, elbows on chair arm. He gloomed at that picture. Then he said what Broughton had a way of saying, a phrase they had in common.

" What possessed you to do that ? " he asked.

He meant by " possessed " simply possessed, as applied to demoniacal or heavenly possession. Robert had heard it often enough to understand. But he had no answer.

" You won't do as well as that again for perhaps two or three years," said Raeburn slowly. " It was a jump you took."

It was a picture of a girl, flaunting and lovely and somewhat tawdry, one of the " common people "—those of whom Scripture tells us that they heard Christ gladly. Yes, one of the common people, a queen of the common people.

Raeburn sighed.

" Helen of the Factories," he said. He had given it a title. " Did the lady like it ? What were her comments while you worked ? "

" I did it from memory."

" Oh ! " Fra looked sidelong at him. " ' Mnemosyne is the mother of the muses,' " he quoted.

" Is it good, sir ? "

" ' The eyelids are a little weary,' " Raeburn quoted.

" There was something pathetic about her too," said Robert. " Have I got that ? "

" Yes. She knows what ' song the sirens sang.' Is it for sale ? "

There was a long pause.

" Yes, I would sell it," said Robert. " But would any one buy it ? Is it good enough ? "

" I would buy it myself," replied Raeburn. " I would

give you fifty pounds for it as an example of the early work of Robert Barclay. That picture is an experience, young man."

He rose and taking it up set it in the middle of the mantelpiece, Robert looking on speechless but his expression as good as speech.

"It can go there for the time being," said Raeburn.
"I'll give you a cheque."

He went over to his desk and made out the cheque, then handed it to Robert. Then he took up his hat and stepped to the door again. They passed out into the hall and Raeburn turned toward the outer door.

"Good-bye, sir," said Robert.

"Not going out?" asked Raeburn.

"No, sir. I'm going to enrol again."

Fra Raeburn's dark eyes showed a flick of light. His mouth twisted in a triumphant smile.

"To take up the journey again after the interlude?" said he, and walked away.

The door swung open and there was a surge of the sounds of the street into the hall as he made exit. The door shut.

Robert stood there looking at the walls, gazing round, renewing acquaintance with the chalk and charcoal drawings in the corridor. Slowly he passed its length. Very, very wonderful—the pick of the school of art drawings were in that room to left, the great selective Raeburn's room, and his painting was there now. He came to the office wicket to enrol.

Yet despite the jump he had taken with *Helen of the Factories* he was only at the beginning. Art is long and life, at times, feels long, no doubt, for an artist without means, except when he is at work and then it flies—or stands still! He was not only aware himself that the sleeves of his one suit were worn. Others were aware. Treating himself to lunch once in a certain restaurant the waiter was aware. But Robert made

that menial who had sniffed at him fawn at the end by a largesse unexpected.

Returned to school, Raeburn set him to copying old masters in the City Galleries. He was under the impression that this was merely a stage in his tuition ; but Fra had other designs. When, after this and the other copying, he had completed one of Rembrandt's *Man in Armour*, Raeburn gave him a letter to a picture dealer who purchased it for a few pounds.

To seem niggling was anathema to Robert's nature, and by the denial of his desire for just a few things he came to desire more. There were times when he talked to himself in speeches wild as those of the psalmist or some poets. He wanted all the world, all the beauty of the world, to have and to hold. His desire for human converse baffled, human converse requiring money, he came by an abstract hunger for knowledge of all the sons and daughters of men. But always his exterior was one of gaiety. His shabby suits might have been a foible, so jaunty his carriage then.

He turned his attention to silver-point, having heard that there were those who would pay for silver-points—from life, of the nude especially. There was one student (student only in name, he desiring no tuition) who did nothing but silver-points from the nude. The masters passed him by when examining drawings. Fra passed him by with impatient step. It was worth while for that merely nominal student to pay fees at the school and attend the life-class. It was cheaper than employing models.

Robert found an antiquarian bookshop, an old miniature and corner-cupboard shop, a sort of rummage shop of objects of art and near art, the owner of which would buy his silver-points, or at least keep them on his counter and when they were sold share the profits. They had to be pretty-pretty for a certain public that knew what it wanted—not stout women but glimmering nymphs, from life. Yet

they permitted vision. There was drawing in them.

"Not too many of these, my boy," Raeburn said one day, halting behind him a moment.

Now and then there were Saturday evening gatherings, Sunday evening gatherings at the home of one or another of his fellow students, he of the company assembled. Or there were Saturday or Sunday tramps out beyond the city—north, on Campsie Fells ; south, to Cathkin Braes ; south-west, trudging along Kilmarnock Road (which, as a boy—slightly set apart, from Serena, Peru, gringo there, gringo here—he had known), and then a deflection by field-paths that became moorpaths to a knob whence one could sometimes see Misty Law like a low volcano, trailing its pennant of mist, over the rolls of Renfrewshire. The lapwings called there as on the Isle of Rathay. The sheep bleated and strayed, the west highland sunsets could be seen from there, crumbling away. He would picture Ian, with the dogs at heel, stepping wide over the moss-hags, going his Sunday rounds.

Guests were not welcomed by his landlady. They were ushered in with a grudging look. Broughton had bought a house by Loch Lomondside, and now and then there were week-ends there, with boating and fishing, or picnicking with Broughton's neighbours, the Scotts. Once, and once only, he went to look again at Carruthers' Academy. That heavy pile affected him lugubriously as though it were the Bastille.

Raeburn's remark about the *Helen of the Factories*—that he would not do as well again for a few years—occasionally remembered, depressed him, which was assuredly not Raeburn's intention. In another mood it was a challenge. He sat by his window out beyond New City Road all one Saturday watching the stray pigeons on the roofs below. He laughed to himself recalling Broughton painting the ducks in the pond at Pebble Glen and how he cried "Quack, quack!"

as he jabbed paint on the canvas and made a wing feather.

The memory inspired him. He set to work. As Broughton had put a splinter of dropped blue sky in the peaty dark of the pond, he gave a hint of some sort of sky, attempting blue reflected in the wet slates. The pigeons sat in a row along the base of a chimney, common pigeons all, common blue-bars—city waifs. Four of them were just hunched against the chill; another, with twisted neck and a drooped wing, scratched its back.

He did not show that to Raeburn, lest Raeburn should think he was hoping for another sale. *City Waifs*, for so he called it, was another “jump” he believed, as Raeburn had called *Helen of the Factories*. He wondered if it was as good as he thought it was, wondered if his delight in the subject had cogged his capacity for self-criticism. Yet, leaving it propped against the wall on top of his chest of drawers for a few days, he saw its faults. Would he try it again, discard that? No. It was not as bad as that. He bethought him of the little old man of the bric-a-brac emporium and parcelling it up marched off with it thither.

There were those whose personality impressed him, appealed to him, before he observed their surfaces more than casually. Not that surface but what overflowed to him was his first portrait of them, a sort of spiritual portrait. Of these were Raeburn, Broughton, and Ian MacCulloch. The little old man of the old books, miniatures, and *objets d'art* and near art, Mr. Thomas Lennox, he noted first as an exterior.

Mr. Lennox suffered from a malady of the eyes, myopic, that made it necessary for him to hold anything he looked at an inch from his nose. He had also a nervous affliction which caused him to tack instead of walk along the streets. In his own neighbourhood policemen knew him by sight and repute, and that he

was not a toper to be arrested. To walk with him was an ordeal. He was prone to what is called "crabbing." One had to tilt against him to progress in a straight line ; otherwise, were one between him and the kerb, one would be thrust off among the horse-hoofs, if on the wall side, tangented against it.

Parcel under arm, Robert arrived at the shop planning a preliminary speech for the production of something other than another silver-point. For a few moments he stood outside, ostensibly gazing at the window display. Then he looked beyond, into the dusky interior, and saw the little old man all alone, hands deep in pockets, pondering, making faces. He entered.

At once Mr. Lennox came at him in a swift series of tacks and standing close peered in his eyes.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "Man, man, do you know, I was just thinking what an extraordinary interesting world it is."

The reason for that consideration he did not divulge, deflected by the parcel under Robert's arm. He stooped and peered at it.

"What's this ?" he asked, and then : "I beg your pardon. Maybe it's none of my business."

"Well, I hope it may be," answered Robert promptly. "It is a picture I have painted. And I just wondered if you would do with it as you have done with the silver-points—stick it up somewhere and see if you can sell it."

"Let's see it."

Robert undid the wrappings and held it at arm's length. That did not do at all. For Mr. Lennox it thus became just a muddle of colour like a stained glass window as seen by a toper. He took it from Robert and set it up against a corner cupboard that stood behind a folded table, thrust his nose against it and made a series of twisting movements up and down and to and fro over it.

"What is it?" he inquired.

"I call it *City Waifs*. It is pigeons on a roof."

"Oh!" and Mr. Lennox tried again. Then—"Do you think it is your forte?" he asked, nose still to canvas.

That was a hard question. Robert did not answer.

"Are ye not being over ambitious?" asked Mr. Lennox.

Robert sighed.

"This noble Brutus hath told you, Cæsar was ambitious!" he remarked gently.

The comment was better than he knew. Lennox was always touched by a quotation.

"Oh, I'm not saying it is not your forte," he ejaculated hastily, "but there are those who would fly before they can walk," he added.

A shadow was at the doorway and he turned.

"Excuse me," he muttered, and divagated toward the shadow, and found it was of a man, a tall man. He peered upward.

"Oh, it's you, sir," he said. "How do you do?"

The new-comer must have been all of six feet three inches, and that he wore a tall silk hat made him seem lofty indeed. And he was of erect carriage. His hair was brindled.

"Any new book-plates?" he asked. "Any new old book-plates, that is? I'm going off for a few years, I think. Just on my rounds before I go to see what I can add to my collection—complete it."

Lennox cannoned behind the counter, peered into a drawer, sniffing, sniffing. He produced what he wanted, and as he brought the sheaf for inspection, and handed it to the tall man, he asked:

"Going far, sir?"

"Quite a way. Peru. That's a good one."

Robert was looking at the man who was going to Peru.

"You might send on your catalogue," said the man.

"Let me see, sir," and Lennox gave a little bow, "it's *Sir* Ewart Lang now, is it not?"

The giant laughed.

"Yes."

"I thought I saw it in the honours list, sir."

Ewart Lang! That was the ex-consul! Now when Mrs. Cameron on her farewell visit to Pebble Glen left Lang's card and message with Robert he had done the correct thing—or at least the courteous little gentleman thing. He had written a youthful letter of thanks and informed the ex-consul that he was getting along very well on a sheep farm and (inspired no doubt by the Camerons' ambitions for him and to round off his letter) had said that he hoped, eventually, to be able to obtain a post as a land steward, and again thanking you for your kindness . . . It was a letter not really conveying the essential Robert, wrecked because of its attempt at fealty to what might be considered orthodox and with the self-consciousness of literary effort.

And now he was possessed by sudden diffidence. Perhaps from not having been allowed to play with the children till he came to prefer looking out of the window—perhaps also from the educational methods of Carruthers' Academy, conducive towards the view that self-effacement was, in moments of doubt, best, and silence golden—he was subject to diffidence. He was taken that way sometimes, not as with timidity but with dumbness, a dumbness that restrained him when surely, by all that seemed sensible, he had received his cue to take the stage and say his words.

"Tip-top! I'll have these four," said Sir Ewart Lang. "Same price as the others, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tip-top! Well, I'll say good-bye. Tip-top, tip-top!"

He turned and dashed off. Suddenly he halted. Robert, to look at the elaborately tooled binding of an old copy of the *Hydriotaphia*, all singing birds perched

on urns and pranked flowers, had moved away from *City Waifs*. Lang paused before it.

"This is interesting!" he exclaimed.

He had produced his pince-nez that he had put away after scrutinising his book-plates, and threw them on his nose with a circular sweep of his arm forth and back. Lennox hurried to him, peering up at him as if he were the Eiffel Tower to discover wherefore his exclamation, and, discovering, wheeled toward Robert. He rejoiced at this interest. His words of doubt over ambition for Robert had been due rather to a custom of canniness in himself than arising from any deep desire to depress the striving. He was pleased that a man with a title admired the work of a struggling artist whom he could forthwith present lurking in his shop, as a conjurer produces a rabbit from a hat.

"Here's the man who did it, sir," he said.

Sir Ewart Lang turned and glared at Robert.

"I wrote to you once, sir," said Robert. "You very kindly left a message for me with the Camerons."

"Camerons! Camerons?"

"He was a baker."

"You mean his original name was Baker, changed to Cameron?"

"No, no, sir. My name is Robert Barclay. You knew my people in Serena."

"Oh, I've got you now! Was that woman's husband a baker? How was I to know? Tip-top! I've got you now. Yes. Cameron, Pollok Street. But you wrote to tell me you were learning sheep-farming. I remember all about you, of course. Everything. Never forget anything."

He stared at Robert afresh, and then rapped out: "By Jove!" He thrust out a long arm and pointed at Robert, who awaited elucidation of all this.

"Your grandfather!" snapped Sir Ewart Lang.

That was all, but Robert understood the implication. He had frequently tried to trace work of that grand-

father and failed. A reference to him, that was no clue to further enlightenment, in an old book on pen-and-ink drawing and etching, was all he had been able to discover. No example had he seen reproduced, even.

Lang turned again to the painting.

"This is wonderful," he said, "for a young man," he added. "Are you studying?" he inquired.

"I've been studying at the Raeburn School."

"Half a minute. Beaton. No, Broughton. Broughton had a chat with me about you once. Are you selling this or just showing it to Mr. Lennox? Is Mr. Lennox acting on your behalf?"

"Oh, you decide that for yourselves," said Lennox.

"He has just brought it in. I had not even promised to see what I could do."

"Look here, I must have a talk with you," said Lang to Robert. "I'm just going to lunch at the club. Come with me if you have no appointment."

"I'd be delighted, sir."

"Pigeons! The pariahs of our city as the dogs are of Serena. Do you remember Serena?"

"Yes. Very well."

Something in the tone of the reply made Sir Ewart Lang look sharply at him.

"Quite, quite. Well, are you selling this picture?"

"That was my intention in bringing it to Mr. Lennox—to see if he could."

"How much do you want for it?"

"I really don't know."

"Nonsense, nonsense! You will never make a success in life if you don't know the value of your work." Sir Ewart caught Robert's elbow as he expressed that view in ordinary, not booming accents, beaming down from his superior height of half a foot.

"Imagine having a thing for sale and no price of it! Diffidence, too. Why, my dear young man, did you not introduce yourself to me when you heard my name? Tact. Push. Principle. Necessary in life. Some people

think principle can be done without. Not so. Look here, don't sell that, Mr. Lennox. We'll leave it here for the time being and go and have lunch. Over lunch we can fix a figure."

"I'll put it aside, sir," said Lennox.

He zigzagged to the door with them, waved their blurred forms away in a gesture as of benediction, and then went back into his shop to put hands deep in pockets and, staring before him, pulling faces, meditate on how vastly interesting life is.

CHAPTER XIX

AT his club this man of business who had made good, as Americans say; got on, as Englishmen say; made weel, as Scotsmen say, by his vitality and perhaps less by tact than by push with no too flagrant departure from principle—and who had not even a hobby purely as a hobby, but as an investment, his book-plates for example—became less energetic. In the club he was definitely away from his office. In the club he sloughed that manner that was cultivated toward energising a large staff of employees. The last of it was paraded in the doorway when he took out his watch and asked a page the time.

"About—" began the boy.

"About!" rumbled Lang. "What good is *about*? If you want to get on in life you must know what the time is, not what it is about, about!"

"Three and a half minutes past one, sir," called the cloakroom attendant.

Lang, divesting himself of his overcoat, thrust out the right arm he had got free of its sleeve, and pointed.

"Tip-top!" he said, and swinging the coat from the other arm, held it to the man.

There, however, was the end of the dynamic. With the leaving of coats, hats, and walking-stick in the

cloak-room, he discarded also the world-levering manner. He relaxed. He was much less of a force than a human being.

Robert was very much at home there sitting opposite him at table. The perspective of massive cream-coloured pillars supporting the ceiling was very pleasing to him. He liked also the strips of deep carpet between, along which the waiters soundlessly diminished in stature, to disappear, marionettes in size, through winking, polished, swing doors and along which they grew on return. He was sketching there without block and pencil, as Johnson spoke of having a book written when he had but planned it in his head. This mental sketching did not detract from his attention to the talk of his host. There seemed to be a draughtsman always on duty inside him to attend to any new pictures, get them down, recorded.

Sir Ewart, asking him of his activities, was greatly impressed to hear of how he had done hack-work and saved money for his art course. That was tip-top. Robert did not have his opinion on the acumen, or wisdom from the point of view of success in life, of throwing it up at the impulse of disgust before the time he had set himself to retain it had come to an end, for he did not mention that. Sir Ewart had the impression of him being able to plan and to carry out a plan.

“ I wish I knew more about my people,” said Robert.

“ A very laudable wish,” replied Lang.

“ Tell me about my father.”

“ My dear boy ! That—er—well, your father was a very brilliant man. He—er—was a gifted man. He was a wonderful linguist. I fancy he was a very sensitive man. One can be too sensitive, of course. Leash the sensitiveness. Do something with it. Otherwise——” he spread his hands.

“ I’ve heard of him indirectly,” said Robert, thinking of the disclosures of old Wylie of Dulse.

"Yes. He was too sensitive. That is my solution. He wanted to escape, I think. And also he was very human. He was a genial man. Naturally, I mean. I neither smoke nor drink. They both put on the brake, tobacco at once, alcohol eventually."

There was a pause.

"That picture of yours," said Lang, changing the subject, "I'd like to have it. What's a fair price? I don't know."

"Neither do I. I don't know what it's worth," replied Robert.

"Twenty pounds," suggested Lang.

"Oh, ample, I'm sure."

"Good. Tip-top! You probably get the gift from your mother's father."

"Do tell me what you know about him."

"I once read an article on him, I think in an old copy of a *Scottish Art Journal*. He had a little money. And he had no desire to make money. He would do work and keep it instead of selling it, and then look at it later and destroy it. Very brilliant, apparently, but eccentric. I suppose he aimed at perfection, so his work is scarce. Most of it is of his early period. His wife used to take his things and send them to exhibitions. After her death he either did very little or destroyed what he had done on later surveys of it."

Lang lifted a hand and pointed at Robert. "I'm merely quoting from what I remember of that article on him. There were some of his things in your old home in Serena, but I suppose you were too young to notice them."

"I remember two pictures of old men that were in the dining-room, over the sideboard, and I recall my mother telling me that her father drew them."

"You do! Well, I don't know where they are. You see, the effects were sold by auction to defray various expenses. Yes, yes, all very sad. Your mother knew

she was going and—wonderful woman—made arrangements ahead. I bought, myself, one of your grandfather's specimens. It was not an etching ; it was a chalk drawing. Look here, let me send it to you. You should have it."

" Oh, I should love to. I say, sir, I tell you what—let us exchange. Let me give you my pigeon picture, seeing you like it, in exchange for that drawing by my grandfather."

They had come to the coffee and Sir Ewart Lang took out a silver pencil and toyed with it in lieu of smoking. He shook his head.

" No," he said. " I appreciate the offer but I want to buy that picture of yours. I think it is wonderful at your age. That end pigeon—you have got the feathers ruffled up a little by a wind." (Robert beamed.)

" On either side of my office window there is a column top. They sit there. You know," he laughed. " I find they interrupt me sometimes. I sit and look at them. Well, well. Time ! I must be going. I'll send you Gartmore's drawing and a cheque for twenty pounds for that painting of yours. I've taken a great fancy to it."

He rose. They passed into the hallway and there, crossing to the coat-room, he turned away to the telephone booth saying : " I'll just tell Lennox to have that picture sent—" He halted. " Oh, he's not had the telephone installed yet, too old-fashioned. I'll pick it up myself on the way home." He turned back. " One would think," said he, " that there was a plan in things sometimes—the way things happen. I go into Lennox's on a last hunt for book-plates before leaving Glasgow for a long trip, and there you are ; and all that without any assistance from you. If I had not stopped to look at your picture I'd not have had this chat. Give me your address. Write it in this little book."

The address written, he put the notebook carefully away, carefully buttoned his great-coat, clapped his

chest, and chanting " Tip-top ! " stepped to the door. An attendant in the hall, energised by his manner, leapt to it and held it open for their exit with magnificent elan.

" Which way ? "

" Up the street, home," said Robert.

" Then good-bye," and the ex-consul crushed his hand warmly. " We'll hear of you. We'll hear of you ! "

He wheeled, delivering a flourishing salute with his walking-stick, and strode impetuously down the street.

Two days later the drawing, and the cheque, arrived. Robert saw that his eccentric grandfather could draw. It was in a sense but a sketch. One could count the lines in it, but he knew enough to recognise that it was a gem. As for subject : It was of a small boy in the attire of an old generation of boys, wearing trousers long as to the ankles and a jacket, tattered, such as Eton perpetuates ; his cap was on the side of his head and askew, the scoop over one ear, the top of it sagging —a grinning little tatterdermalion perched atop of an upturned boat indicated by but one sure and entralling line.

CHAPTER XX

TERM was over. School was closed for the long summer vacation. There was a sense of emptiness in the city for Robert. He knew from many talks during the last days where some of his fellows were ; and many were far off. One was on Spey side, another in Balquhidder, another in Skye, two in the forest of Fontainbleau. The Broughtons were in Italy; the great Fra was in the Tyrol.

The need for money was not as clamant then, but there was hardly enough to permit of a holiday far distant. With the money he had saved while in purgatory he had been frugal. Bitter to have to be frugal ! Cheese-paring was not in his nature, but he

could eke out what he had saved with this or the other additional assistance. Apart from the two purchases—Fra's and Sir Ewart Lang's—there was another old master copied and sold. There were six covers to be done for pieces of music, ordered by a printer and publisher of popular songs. He also knew what the public wanted—in the way of covers for pieces of music—and what, therefore, artists must purvey or go without their ten shillings and sixpence per cover. That was all they were worth he said. And from one point of view Robert agreed, from another, did not. He executed two, one day, then strolled down to Lennox's. But he had been there three evenings in succession. Lennox, he thought, would be getting weary of the sight of him.

There was one part of the city that Robert had constituted out of bounds for himself. He went no more along Argyle Street eastwards. Helen of the Factories was there. In his loves and his lechery pity could insinuate itself. Early in life the capacity to pity had been awakened.

Not but what there were times when he had the impulse to go in search of Helen. There were. But out of that sweet, sad passion might come gamins who would sit drowsy in entries when they should have been abed, peering up at passing strangers with pitifully young old eyes and, growing, take up the tale of jam-pot covers in their turn. It would be terrible if he had a child unkempt in these doorways in the bases of the tenements, at high windows of which women appeared and screamed "Murder, polis!" the police paying no heed, aware that the beldames were but drunken and drink-demented away up there in the squalid holes of their cliff dwellings.

Helen of the Factories, he decided, was of the past. He relegated her to the domain of accident. She was of the period when he was not, as Fra had it, travelling. But he would find he could not effectually dismiss her.

His whole life was a web. It had a design. It was all of a piece. He could not cut off a bit and forget it.

Three nights in succession he had dropped in at Lennox's. Approaching it, that evening, he hesitated. He turned away. From the upper reaches of Buchanan Street, where was Lennox's shop, he went tangenting eastward, crossed George Square and passed on to Ingram Street, a long stretch of closed warehouses on either side of the gas lamps in their rows. He passed down Glassford Street. Had he only gone down Buchanan Street to Argyle Street and there turned east the proximity of the library at Miller Street might have deflected his steps. On the other hand it might not. Once he had tossed a coin down there and flaunted its guidance. It seemed, upon this evening, as though he regretted his virtue that had held him from Helen's neighbourhood, and would fain exorcise the sentiment of pity for waifs of waifs.

By cross-cuts that did not give the library's proximity chance to deflect him he came to her locality again. He peeped in at the doors she had peeped in at on a night that he had decided to forget. He walked to and fro, went the round again, peeping in at these doors. Time passed. The hours chimed from a neighbouring clock. There she was. He hurried to meet her. It was not she. There she was ! He hurried after her. It was not she.

He halted. He was determined then to find her. The name of the narrow street to which she had taken him he did not know, but he could find it. Not only did he find it, but the entry leading to that rearward court. He went obliquely across it. He climbed the stairs to the top. That it was the top storey he had to mount to he knew, because of his memory of the skylight and the blatter of rain on it. The light in the keyhole again was his guide along the unlit corridor. He knocked. Who would open ? The people in these places come and go, he surmised, markedly transient.

The door opened and there was the old one-eyed crone. Seeing him alone her aspect changed.

"Is it the polis?" she asked.

"Don't you remember me? I came here with Mary a while ago." He slipped half a crown into her palm.

"Oh, I ken ye fine," she said. "It's the prince. It's him they cry the prince. Was ye wantin' a lassie?"

"I was wanting to see Mary," he said.

"Come in."

He stepped inside and she shut the door.

"Mary has gone to Dundee," she said. "She is a restless crayture." (*Crayture* she said. There was Irish there, he thought in an aside.) "She's been gone awhile. She was only up here twice, if I mind right, after that night wi' you. Aye, just twice, wi' two ither gentlemen."

"She's gone to Dundee," said he, and turned to the door.

"I might get ye a lassie," the crone announced, peering at him with anxiety as though in a kindly commiserating intent, wishing to discover how great his need.

"No," he said. "It was Mary I was wanting—to see."

Suddenly a lecherous grin spread on that face before him.

"Well, my bonny boy," she said, and putting out a hand she stroked his cheek somewhat in the way that Mary at Pebble Glen sometimes used to when passing him at table.

He opened the door and backed away, bowing to her.

"Thank you, thank you," he said.

"Oh, dinna mention it. Dinna mention it," she responded, and stood there bobbing to each of his bows, a horrible and hilarious grotesque.

The door shut. He fumbled his way down the stairs and, getting back to the main streets, hied him home in a daze.

He woke early in the morning to smoky sunlight, a gold lacquer on the roofs. Thin intermittent zephyrs fanned and passed outside, leaving vague hints of fields over which they had come. There was even the scent of flowers, it seemed. It might be so. For the public parks of the city were then brilliant with blossom.

He could be subject to sudden impulse as well as open to assaults of memory. The impulse at wakening that morning he could not thwart. He for the Isle of Rathay ! For just a week-end he would go. It was Saturday. The other commissioned music covers he would do on his return. He would afford the fare—whether he could or not.

CHAPTER XXI

THE low green fields, the low twinkling lochs among rushes on the flat lands westward, slipped smoothly past the windows of the early train. Came next the jumbling waters of the Firth and the steamer beside the wharf, gulls dipping and screaming over it. No sirens hooting and complaining in fog that day ! From the deck Robert could see the gold sickles of Ayrshire beaches, the pattern of fields in Bute, the pinnacles and corries of Arran. Rathay Fell, drawing near the voyage's end, was spears of blue rock above purple moor veined with silver.

There was yet no pier at Dulse. As they rounded the cape into Dulse Bay he saw the big bluff rowing-boat coming out. Two men in blue jerseys were at the sweeps, one seated to row, the other standing facing the bow, thrusting forward on an oar. The bell clanged in the engine room. The steamer slowed, stopped. The boat was alongside and the two men were at once busily employed grabbing bags handed to them by the stewards and fending off in the unmatched rise and

fall of steamer and boat, the waves smacking and plashing.

One of the oarsmen Robert did not know. The other he recognised, but not until they had thrust off from the steamer, and she was churning on, was there opportunity for salutation. His nod, however, received but a nod of courtesy in response, not of recognition.

" You don't remember me," he said.

" Well, now that I look at you I kind of remember you."

" I used to be with Mr. MacCulloch——"

" Oh, aye. Pebble Glen. I mind ye."

But they were alongside the little jetty, with more occupation there for the boatmen. Ashore Robert trudged up the beach. There was the usual summer knot of onlookers, hatless visitors elated over leisure and salty winds, girls strutting to and fro tensing leg muscles and feeling very conscious of physical well-being, young men biting upon briar pipes, bathing towels round their necks, bathing suits under arms.

At the post-office door the cart stood ready, but it was not the old enormous postman, the mountain of a man, who was carrying up the mail-bags from the boat. Had he gone, puffing asthmatical with his bottle and his laugh out of the scene? No, there he was at the door. Robert stepped across to him and held out his hand.

" I ken the face but . . ." and then : " Well, the lad from Pebble Glen. Ye'll be going to the MacCullochs, whatever ? "

" Yes."

" They are aye there. I'm not driving the cart now. The lad is on the job."

" I think I'll walk. I'd like to walk."

" I'll tell him to gi'e ye a lift when he makes up on ye. Aye, aye. They tell me ye are a penter. A hoose-penter, is it ? " And there was the old chuckle.

Robert laughed.

" Surely ye can pent a hoose ! " exclaimed the postman, still with his manner of badinage. " A man that's learning to pent pictures can surely pent a hoose, whatever. I'll tell him to give ye a lift. Here, here, a minute. Come in ben the hoose and have a little drap of—milk. I have some rale good auld—milk ! "

For a sentiment Robert would have liked to have had that " auld milk " in the little inn where he had sat with Watty Wylie, a proud drover—ages ago. Being back here again and the remembering of Wylie brought a sequence of thoughts that occupied his mind while he was engaging in what, by comparison, was mere small talk with the postman and his great broad wife in the kitchen. Much had happened since last he was here. He had known loneliness in Glasgow. There had been the affair with Helen of the Factories, whom he remembered with tenderness instead of with the regret of a contrite sinner.

" Aye, indeed, ye have been living a great life in Glasgow. Different from Rathay, I'm thinking."

" By the way," Robert asked, " do you remember, long ago, years ago, a painter—an etcher—visiting here, called Robert Gartmore ? "

The postmaster thought, rolling his yellow eyeballs. The postmaster's wife thought, gazing into a ceiling corner. They shook their heads in unison.

" A widower I believe he was," said Robert, " with a young daughter."

They shook their heads again.

" Summer visitors," the postman remarked, " visitors, visitors. Man, they come and they go. And there has always been penters among them." He laughed cheerily. " Each of them thinks he has found the beauty of the island for himself. Each of them is Columbus in Rathay, to himself. But they have aye been coming and going as long as I can remember. Why, when I was a bit laddie there was a penter give me a bottle of lemonade and saxpence for sitting on

top of an upturned boat for twa-three minutes, for him to make a sketch of me. And that's long ago."

"Aye, indeed, I should think so," said his wife, "if it was lemonade ye had to drink."

He glanced at her, then looked out of the door.

"What was he like?" asked Robert, thinking of the sketch Sir Ewart Lang had given him.

"Who? Oh, the skitcher. I have no recollection. I think he had a beard." He made a motion before his own long bib-like one, an opening and closing of a hand. "What they call a Van Hooten beard, I think. Man, I'll have to go to see to the mail-bags."

The nip of "auld milk" tossed off they passed out into the fresh wind and the thud of waves again. Robert's bag, placed in the cart by the postmaster, was to be dropped at the bottom of Pebble Glen. The MacCullochs might be able to put him up or they might not, but that would be the best place to leave it. If he had to go on to Waterfoot Inn it was not a long way to carry it.

To see how far he could get before the cart overtook him was then Robert's object. He turned west and saw the whitewash line of the coastguard houses. He trudged on, gaily swinging his ash stick till, round a bend, he saw a wood ahead. It was like the forest in *Macbeth*. It had mysteriously appeared there. Why, yes, that would be the old "planting," grown up. No longer was it of little trees, shoulder high, over which one could look to the upper moors. It was a tall pillared sign, a place of trembling and shifting gleams and glooms.

Beyond the wood should be the smithy. And there it was, under the spreading chestnut tree. Leaning against the door was John Reid in shirt sleeves and leathern apron, but a broadened John. Robert turned aside from the road into the sweep of hoof-marked loam before the door and John came erect, wondering what the stranger wanted.

" How do you do ? " said Robert.

John raised a hand to his forelock that hung below his cap.

" Well, is't you ? " he cried out, and grabbed Robert's hand in his calloused right and clapped his calloused left atop, and levered Robert's arm as if it were the bellows. " I didna recognise ye, not expecting ye. Well, well. The same auld Rab."

" Do you own this place now ? " asked Robert.

" Not yet. Rome wasna built in a day, ye ken. The boss is down to the coastguard sending away a telegram aboot summer visitors for the half of his hoose. Come in and sit doon and give us your news."

As for the Island news, John communicated it with some discernment, a trifle caustic perhaps in places. Apart from Ian he had never shared Robert's affection for the MacCulloch household.

" It's much the same up at Pebble Glen," he said. " Miss, she says when ye speir after the auld lady, ' Oh, she's failing, I think. She's a guid age, ye ken. The wish is faither to the thought, I'm thinking. She hangs on ower long for Agnes MacCulloch. Och, well, she wants to get married, I suppose. It's possibly a question of accommodation, and if they build more they are taxed more. That's what they all say. Improve your property and you pay more taxes. If the auld ledy would oblige by dying then Agnes would get married. She'll no' have them let the wee cottage the boarded-out Mr. Dewar used to bide in. That's for Ian when the auld ledy dies—nice for him to have his ain hoose, ye ken. Man, yon was an awful death ! He came ower the moors one winter and there was ower many drifts and him ower drunk. The dog fetched Ian oot, but he was dead—chewing tobacco. They tell me the tobacco was frozen to the side of his mouth and it open."

It was a point that had stuck in their minds apparently. Just then the post-cart came along and—

"There ye are," said the driver. "Ye're a grand walker, a great traiveller. Weel, I can give ye a lift on now."

The interruption caused by the cart's arrival had prevented an inquiry for Mary. But he would see them all soon now. To Pebble Glen he continued perched beside the driver.

"Whoa!" The cart stopped and Robert jumped out. "Here's some letters for them."

Letters in hand Robert trudged slowly up the steep, rutted road. It was a cleft of hawthorn scent and wild roses. Bees blundered past. A bull roared exasperation far off.

Suddenly there was Mary coming bouncing downhill. One of her laces was loose and she stooped to tie it, thrusting a foot against the bank. Hefty as ever! Looking up after that she saw him and ceased to bounce, walked on circumspectly. A big, buxom wench she was, with a complexion city girls would envy, if not a figure. Her breasts swayed under her blouse; her coarse black hair, thick, profuse, whipped to and fro. As she passed she peeped shyly aslant at him. Robert made no sign. No, let her go on. Then he turned, and she was looking back, frowning.

"Mary, don't you know me?"

"I couldna believe it," she cried out in explanation. "I thought ye must be a summer visitor coming to call on the ither visitors at the Glen. And I was thinking ye was awful like yourself. Ye ken what I mean," and gaily she laughed.

Her plump hand was in his throughout that explanation. She began to walk uphill with him.

"Och!" she exclaimed. "The letters. I was going down for them."

"Here they are," said he, and took them from his pocket.

She swayed along beside him, flipping the letters from one hand to the other or, for a change, holding

the sheaf of them in her mouth and with her big, pearly teeth biting their edges. She was shy and elated.

“ You look well,” he said.

“ I’m never ill ava. I’m an awful big eater they say too. Ye’re looking fine yourself. Fancy me not knowing ye ! Wasn’t it funny ? ”

She had to stop and bend to enjoy to the full her laughter over the fun of that. At the yard she danced ahead.

“ Guess who I’ve brought ye with the letters ! ” she called out, looking in at the milk-house door.

Whoever was inside did not hear. Mary entered, and Robert heard Miss MacCulloch’s voice :

“ Here, here, what are ye eating the letters for ? Can you no’ comport yourself ? ” Then she came out to see what excited the wench. “ Well, I declare ! ” she ejaculated.

She wiped her hand on her apron and advanced to him, crushed his hand in hers, bony after Mary’s plump one, and turning to the girl she pinched her chin between thumb and forefinger.

“ No wonder ye were excited,” she said. “ Got your auld jo back again ! ”

Mary, who had been subdued over the rebuff for eating the letters, pirouetted, spun round once on a heel like a tee-totum. She made Robert think of a dog that is dejected one minute and wagging the next. Miss MacCulloch rolled down her sleeves and they went on toward the farmhouse door.

“ Well, well, Ian will be overjoyed to see ye,” she said. But at the door she restrained him, holding his elbow with secretive manner. “ I’d better tell ye before ye go in,” she murmured. “ Ye must be prepared for a change in the auld lady, my mither. She’s failing. I’d like to hear just what ye think of her, you that hasn’t seen her for lang. But I think ye’ll not but see the change.”

Agnes seemed to him to have changed herself. She was a trifle gaunt. There was a drawn look about her eyes. She was suddenly aware again of Mary bouncing beside them, grinning broadly, snatched the letters from her, and ran an eye through them.

"Here, take these," said she, pushing them back again. "They are all for the visitors, but they are oot. Put them on the mantel in their end."

Mrs. MacCulloch was at the fire, sitting there gazing at a pot that hung above the flaming peats. A pair of bellows lay on her lap. As Robert entered she looked up. There was no change that he could see. It seemed to him that time had stood still for the "auld lady," but perhaps the warning to expect change was responsible, having caused him to look for signs of decrepitude.

She stared at him, then rose.

"Don't ye ken him?" asked Agnes, and in an aside, as though her mother were deaf and would not hear it: "She's failing, ye ken, and maybe she doesn't—"

"Och, aye, it's only the light in my eyes. Of course I ken him right awa'. Well, well," and Mrs. MacCulloch held him at arm's length, a hand on each of his shoulders, "the herd-laddie. Is it not ridiculous? Mair gentry-like than ever. Have ye come back to take up the sheep business again? But sit ye doon. Ian will be in soon."

The door opened at that moment and Ian entered.

"There ye are, Rab," he said.

There was no demonstration.

"I kent I'd step in some day and see ye here," he explained.

"Aw, fiddlesticks!" cried out his sister. She turned to Robert. "Mary telt him ye were here and he's just acting as if he wasna surprised."

"I havena seen Mary," replied Ian. "How long are ye here for?"

"Just for a week-end. I had to pay you a surprise visit."

Agnes and her brother exchanged glances. The mother made a motion of her head.

"Ye can have the bed in the wee cottage," said Agnes. "The man we have now is sleeping in the loft. Ian is in his summer quarters up there too. We have kept Mr. Dewar's hoose in case maybe some fisherman, or single man, might want to have it for the summer. It's real comfortable. Yon was an awfu' death. Out on the moors," she held up a hand and waved the palm at Robert. "That drunk he couldna get hame. We'll have to tell you about that night, him dead in a drift and the tobacco frozen in his mouth and it open."

Ian did not trouble to announce that he had mentioned that memorable incident in a letter to Robert. But later, out in the yard : "I ken fine," said he, "ye wouldna care to sleep in that hoose doon there. I didna explain to them for they wouldna understand. It's what ye call association."

"To tell you the truth, if it does not seem foolish I'd rather not," said Robert.

Mary came out of the farm and walked toward them, looking shyly at Robert.

"See, Mary," said Ian, "tell the orra-man he might go down to the road and bring up Rab's bag. He's going to nae inn." He turned to Robert : "Nor are ye going to sleep in the drouth's cottage. Come on. We'll go up in the loft and I'll make ye a bed in no time. I have two mattresses under me. We'll put one for you. There's plenty blankets. It's easy done without clash."

On Sunday Robert and Ian, with the oddest feeling that all between their last tramp on the hills and this one was but a dream, went the old rounds, sat at the appointed places where no doubt Ian had travelled in his own way, sitting still, looking over the heather. There was something extraordinary to Robert in the cresting again, of that little cone of hill with the top knocked off, the black pool in the hollow and a drop of sky in the middle of it.

"I often think of this place," said Robert.

"Aye. D'ye mind the big stag we saw one day, richt on a ridge?"

"Yes, indeed I do."

"It's funny the things a body remembers," said Ian, "often not the kind of things that there's a big to-do about at all."

"I know," said Robert.

"Aye, indeed."

There was healing here, and refreshed, renewed, Robert got back to Glasgow late on the Monday night. On the Tuesday morning, turning the pages of the *Herald*, his eye lit on what he looked for but hardly expected to find so soon: *Raeburn School of Art Awards*. He drew a long breath. His eye ran down the column. *Apsley Travelling Bursary, Robert Barclay*. He sat back in his chair. He stared out of the window where was a thin veneer of sun on the slates and over them a volley of pigeons. Anticoli-Corrado, he thought to himself, or Spain perhaps.

"Well, that's that," he said aloud.

It was also his twenty-first birthday and his landlady, entering then, handed him a letter all the way from California, its time of travel most excellently estimated by "aunt" Cameron, to wish him many happy returns of the day. Thirteen years before she had received a long letter from her one-time employer and friend, Mrs. Barclay, a part of which related to this day. This was the day on which Robert was to be told why he had been sent away from Serena.

But Mrs. Cameron ignored that behest. She realised, from letters she'd had from Robert, that he knew the essentials. He had mentioned his talk with auld Watty Wylie; he had told her of his lunch with Sir Ewart Lang. That his mother, bidding the boy farewell, had assured him that when he was twenty-one he would know all, she was unaware; but even had she known of that it would have made no difference. Robert

knew now all that he would need to know. What seems agonisingly important to-day may be of little consequence to-morrow.

Though he could recall much from his sixth year it was almost all in pictures. He saw the rooms of the old house in Serena still, even to the pools of sunlight in the polished wood of the floors. He had memories of his mother, even to the frocks she had worn, even to a brooch. Of that promise of hers, however, there came back no memory. Oblivion was on that. But still he could recall her, propped on pillows, her arms stretched to him, brave laughter in her eyes although they shone with tears.

He thought of her a great deal that day and nobody knows for certain that she was not thinking of him, aware of his journey. It was once almost as if she passed through the room. In the evening he wrote to Mrs. Cameron to thank her for her letter and give her the news of his success.

CHAPTER XXII

So he saw, and smelt, Anticoli-Corrado. He saw colours new to him in foreign parts, hues of rude health (and lack of ablution) on brown faces, hues reminiscent of the tones of verdigris inside old copper pots. Narrow and picturesque streets that became flights of steps at intervals and took abrupt twists under, perhaps, a thirteen century window that was like a flower in the old stone, he came to know as intimately as the road to the low pasture down Pebble Glen. Interiors also he saw, people and pigs all together sometimes on the other side of these flower-like windows.

The shrill importuning of *Dammi un soldo* was a refrain all the time. Girls carried pitchers to the wells with an added slatternly grace when they saw a painter. He painted the bluey-green coats, the blue

shadows, the sunlight. He painted gamins whose torn trousers (upheld by a string from the last button in front to the remaining button behind) were all their apparel. They were young old, some of them. They reminded him at times of the waifs of the frog-cold palms into which he had dropped coppers elsewhere.

He had travelled in more than Spain and Italy when he returned to Glasgow at the age of twenty-three. Broughton was in town then and came along to a top floor studio that Robert had rented in West Regent Street to look at what he had been doing. Mrs. Broughton was with him and they had tea with the inevitable cream puffs and éclairs that young men provide for their guests on such occasions. One by one he set up paintings on his easel for Broughton's scrutiny and criticism ; and from a survey of one the older man turned and looked at his wife.

" Oh, yes. A swan," she said, her lips hardly moving

Robert was on the point of asking explanation when something Broughton said deflected the inquiry. It was never made. But, as John Reid quoted when Robert asked him if he was boss of the smiddy, *Rome was not built in a day*. To win the Apsley Travelling Bursary did not mean that his sacrifices for the cause were over. Always beginnings.

Five years later he gave a one-man show in a gallery in Renfield Street. It was chiefly of portraits. There were Raeburn's mother (a tranquil thing that showed how beautiful age could be), Mrs. Broughton, Dr. Broughton (her son), among these. It happened that at that time the rationalist, George Hatrick (author of *No Hereafter*, *Vulgar Error*, *The Fallacy of Belief in Eternal Life*, *Did Homer Exist?*) was on a lecture tour which ended in Glasgow. He saw that exhibition and decided to have his portrait painted by Robert. He was going to remain in the city, the lecture-tour over, for some time. Would Robert come to the hotel he was in to do the portrait ? Or would he come to

Robert's studio when he had time ? In the end it was decided that Hatrick would come to the studio.

" I can't paint you slap-bang. I've got to look at you," said Robert.

" Of course. I'll drop in, or drop up, to begin with, just as I can and chance seeing you, and you can look at me."

Hatrick had summed up this young artist, at first sight, as a sentimental believer in a painter's heaven where he might get further tips from Velasquez and talk to Titian on life and art. He would have a portrait by him but he would rob him of any hope in a blessed resurrection before that portrait was done.

Yet the question of annihilation or eternal life meant nothing to Robert at the moment. To get Hatrick upon canvas was the whole duty. And all this mortuary zest, this gratulation on mortality upon which the fellow harped with such zeal, and so stubbornly, made Robert merely hope that death would not come before he got his portrait done. Staring at Hatrick, seeing him, he was gripped by a new emotion. Life was flying—whither, no matter ; it was flying. And it would be heart-rending if he died before he finished this job. That emotion made him tense in the high chamber where the only sound, apart from Hatrick's voice (now harsh as a rook's, now cooing like that of turtle-doves) was of wind among the chimney tops.

He set Hatrick talking and he observed him. The pride of mind he did occasionally consider and wondered how Hatrick would feel could he convert all men to his belief, wondered if then pride of mind would launch him upon a belief in immortality.

Hatrick, in youth, had rebelled against the gospel of a hell of fire. He knew there were those who, freed from the terror of the hell of fire, would have a little hell of their own here ; but he thought that the risk of such a hell was better than the continuance of " pitiable superstition under the name of religion," as he used to say.

He was, perhaps, an extremist. Had he known a spiritual experience of his own he would probably have explained it away as the result of a late supper, even though late suppers as a rule did not trouble him. He had travelled and seen precisely these cathedrals that Robert had seen. The result on him had been a rage that on their steps were the sick, the untended maimed, the poor who, had the money that built the churches been spent upon social welfare schemes and medical research instead, would not have had to sit begging.

He was not infallible. He was human. He admired Robert's work ; but at sight of him he had conceived of him as one who had to have his dream tower, for his own good and progress, battered down with heavy artillery. He did not realise that the look of the enthusiast on the young artist's face was more that of an entranced observer of this world than of a dreamer of a painter's heaven at the end. Robert was not thinking of the end but was elated over the journey, the sights upon the way.

There is no doubt that Robert then, because of this rationalist, was sent along depressing corridors of thought where the lights were turned down, to the tune of "worms, graves and epitaphs." Yet the depression would melt away at sight of a line of thin sun and thin shadow down some columns supporting a façade of the city's buildings, or of pigeons with iridescent breasts round the nose-bags of dray horses, lorry horses, in side streets.

"I think," he said to Hatrick one morning, "we'll have a shot at the canvas to-day," and having put in all his preliminaries in one crowded hour he stopped.

On Hatrick's next visit he got him to the chair of execution, and then :

"Tell me your views again about the folly of belief in survival," he said as he stood before his prepared canvas.

Hatrick was more than willing.

"The fundamental instinct in life," he began as though plunging into a lecture, and gazing at Robert with a blind look in his eyes. He paused there, raised a hooked hand above his head and as he spoke brought it down slowly. "The fundamental instinct in life," he repeated, "is to hold on to life. You must see that that, obviously, breeds a belief in eternal life," and he crushed his thigh with the hand that had settled there.

"I fear I don't follow," said Robert. "I should rather think that from the clinging on to life might be inferred the belief that there is nothing after."

Hatrick pouted. His face went sullen. Robert peered and painted as one possessed.

"I believe that when I die I shall merely—" Hatrick raised his hand. He sat bolt upright. The hand came slowly down and again clutched his thigh. "—rot!" he brought out. "I believe that nothing of my ego will survive. But I should scorn to shiver with terror at the thought of annihilation."

"Quite," agreed Robert. "There is nothing to shiver over in annihilation. If you believed in the old Calvinist hereafter with a possible hell, then you might shiver—or sweat," he added and jabbed a brush on his palette and stepped to the canvas again.

Hatrick treated that as though it had not been spoken. What he did not wish to hear he did not, in a sense, hear—let it go.

"Happiness is not the less happiness because it must come to an end," said Hatrick, deflecting slightly. "Many men have carried themselves on the scaffold bravely, nobly, without fear."

"Most of them," Robert suggested, "upheld by belief in a blessed resurrection, or a happier continuance of the soul, rather than by the view that at the drop of the axe, or guillotine, all was over."

He seemed to be talking in an aside, painting the main matter. His subject sat speechless awhile after that. He began to hate Robert. This painter had no

mercy on him. This painter had no knowledge, it seemed, of the flight of time. Then at last, as if they had spoken only a few minutes before, Robert, after a long rigid stare, inquired :

“ You believe you have no immortal soul ? ”

The eyes regarded him with an empty stare. Something looked out for a moment, just a moment, and went away. Robert gazed long at those blank windows and then put the last touch to the eyes.

“ It is finished,” he said. Then to himself he added : “ Nobody at home.”

“ What did you say ? ”

“ Did I speak aloud ? ” Robert asked. “ Perhaps I said, ‘ It is finished.’ ”

“ You said something. Hell, I’m stiff.”

Hatrick rose and limping over to the canvas looked at it. It was the first of those swift paintings that Robert did practically at one sitting, and some have called unfinished sketches. But he refused, though Hatrick thought it might be made to look “ more finished,” to touch it again.

The Institute exhibition was then soon to be opened and Robert, with Hatrick’s enthusiastic approval, sent in that portrait. It was his first attempt at the Institute, and it hung on the line.

On opening day it happened that Robert met Fra Raeburn at the street door. They walked up the stairs together. At the gallery entrance Fra accepted a catalogue but did not open it. He merely took notes on the back, walking round, notes of subject and probable painter of this and that picture which caught him, that, looking at the catalogue later, he could have evidence of his eye’s surety regarding individual technique.

When they came to this portrait of Hatrick in Robert’s new manner, Fra paused.

“ Some master did that,” said he. “ Got him ! I never saw the fellow but I know he got him ! I wonder

how long it took? And I wonder who did it? I can't place that handling. Oh, *le bon Dieu* is great to make hands that can do these brush-marks!"

"It took—apart from the preliminary blocking-in—four hours," said Robert abruptly.

Fra wheeled on him.

"You did it? My dear boy! My dear Robert!"

He had always called him Barclay before that. Fra, growing older, was becoming mellower. Not that he had ever been frigid at heart.

"Who is he?" he asked. "Though *Portrait of a Man with No Soul* would do for the title."

"That's queer," said Robert. "It is George Hatrick, who believes that when he gets a clap on the head with a shovel that's that—*absit omen*."

"That's Hatrick, is it? I did not go to his lecture because he knows no more about the subject than I don't. And, on that subject, what do you think, old man?"

"Oh, I don't know. I was only painting him."

That Raeburn was pleased with the portrait was obvious. As for Broughton, Robert was not certain if he liked it. He surmised a silent pronouncement of dissatisfaction.

"What's wrong with it?" he asked Broughton.

"I did not say I thought anything wrong with it," his friend replied. "I've just been telling you I think you pulled it off, and a difficult job it was."

A very tolerant man, always looking for the redeeming qualities even in those whose average outlook exasperated him (in fact what Hatrick called a sentimentalist), Broughton wondered if Robert had got the essential man. That technique charmed him. The young man's eye for surfaces he realised was alert indeed, but he was uncertain if this pigmented verdict upon Hatrick was accurate. He looked upon Robert still as his protégé, his discovery, thought about him often, had very high hopes of him.

Meeting Robert a few days later it pleased Broughton to hear that he was going to have a rest.

"It has just occurred to me," said Robert, "that I have been toiling for years without a lull. Two years travelling in Italy and Spain: that was holiday, but it was work too. And I was often so keyed up then that, I can see now, it was tiring. For five years since I came back it has just been work, work. Funny thing, but after painting that man Hattrick I've felt done. Done. I seem to want to get away somewhere and rest, and think it all out and"—he hesitated—"see where I am going to—and begin afresh," he ended.

"Splendid idea. I know the feeling. Take a load of books. I'll tell you—go to our place on Loch Lomond. There is the gardener there. His wife will 'do for you.' I'll write to them."

Robert had been considering Rathay as a refuge where he could tinker himself out of this dejection, discover its cause and end it. He had thought of Ian often during these last days, Ian's silences, Ian's infrequent but so strangely satisfying and comprehending remarks.

"It's awfully good of you," he said.

"It's nothing at all. It helps to keep the place aired. Gets damp with nobody in it. They light fires for us when we are not there, but that's different from having it occupied."

So to the Broughtons' Loch Lomond home went Robert, arriving with a bagful of clothes, a bagful of books, and was welcomed by old Sandy Campbell the gardener, and by Mrs. Campbell.

It was good to sit down and rest. At last he had come to a place in his journey where he could do so without either self-reproval for laziness or worry. He had sufficient money, that necessary evil, it seemed, of life, to relax, let the world wag.

He did so, and at once everything wore a new light before his eyes. He leant back at ease and was aware

of the new-washed state of the glass of the long windows. For a moment or two he wondered if they were open. He stepped over, found them closed, opened one and at once the sigh of wind came into the room.

"God, I am tired and this is good," he said.

He lay and rested in an extraordinary tranquillity, toying with his coloured treasures of memory that he had not had time to look at for long. He remembered sunlight on a polished floor in Serena, Peru ; soap-bubbles he had blown when five years old—yes, five or six he must have been—he saw again. Blowing soap-bubbles from the roofed balconies was a common diversion for children held indoors during the brief hissing rainy-season there. Splash ! A drop of rain had ended all. Hatrick, it came into his head, would have it that man's life was practically like that.

Hatrick's society had tired him. It was because of the lingering sense of depression, perhaps, that the memories arising now were not all of things tranquil, consoling, not all of beauty without terror. He saw again not only the sun of the South Atlantic on the ship that brought him to this land, not only the blue doldrums and his shadow under the equatorial sun, a small circle round his feet that he tried with laughter to step beyond ; but he recalled a night when the cordage shrieked, followed by a day when he was not allowed on deck, sat in the cabin wedged in a corner of the great end divan. He recalled getting into his berth and confronting the sea whirling past just on the other side of the port-hole, rushing over the glass, no sky there at all.

From old memories he turned to recent ones, pondered upon his Helen of the Factories—not the picture but the original, the second Mary of his life. He wondered where she was and how she fared. It was a relief to him to consider there had been other "gentlemen." He at least had not been a discarding seducer.

He had but dipped into her amoral (or promiscuous) life.

Thought of her set him wondering what passions, recognised, unlicensed, had been in the lives of those before him. And out of the distant past there came the face of a brown Peruvian nursemaid. Vaguely he remembered her looking down on him, holding his hand ; vaguely he recalled her weeping one day, and his father standing by her to one side and his mother to the other with an expression on her face he could not understand. He was again looking on in that room where they were. That was the last time he saw the nursemaid. A picture without a story that one was, but by reason of some childish sense of grave matters under discussion it had impinged itself. In the light of experience he could make hazard at a story to explain the picture.

He had been here by Loch Lomond close upon a week, resting, loafing, chatting with Sandy in the garden, or on an upturned tub in the potting-house—going down across the fields to swim each morning—when the postman, by some carelessness, left the letters for the Scotts (the nearest neighbours) at Broughton's house.

There were letters for all of the Scotts and apparently also for a guest variously styled Miss Chadwick, Miss Mary C. Chadwick, Miss M. C. Chadwick. She had a large correspondence.

“ M.C.,” he muttered. “ Mistress of the Ceremonies,” for he was feeling rested and jocund that morning.

He told the tortoise-shell cat, which had come up to live with him from the Campbells' cottage, that he thought he'd go out with these letters, “ despite the fact that you are so sedulously washing over your ears and that it is already raining like the dickens.”

He went to the window and looked out. And in what he saw he revelled. An enormous cloud was travelling up behind the hills opposite, a cloud the hue of terror,

majestic and fearful and awful. Lines of rain like sawn steel were slanting from it. The tops of the elms were bent over and remained so for a minute on end, trying to straighten and prevented. There were loud cracks from breaking branches. He saw two hurtle down. What a day! What a day for a trudge against that wind, for a fight with it, for just living without asking what it was all for or whither trending.

He drew on a heavy rain-coat, found hat and stick, and set off.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT the drawing-room window of the house that was his destination, Mary Cynthia Chadwick stood looking out at the day. Her face was exquisite in the reflected storm light. She was very beautiful, her figure in its every movement full of grace, her features chiselled, her eyes blue as the sky of the fairest summer day, and lustrous.

"What a depressing cloud!" she murmured. "I can't tell you how it depresses me. And the rain! Isn't it awful?"

"I wish I could get it to stop for you, dear," her hostess replied. "But you know, really, if you put on top boots and a mackintosh——"

"Slosh, plosh, that's all. I couldn't," Mary interrupted.

"It's better than looking at it. You'd come back so refreshed that you could eat an ox."

"But I've no desire to eat an ox. And look at that horrible light over the whole place. Oh, Jean, I can't think how you stand it."

Jean Scott was annoyed. To be sure, she considered, it is the part of a hostess to entertain a guest and, for the fitting entertainment, to discover her likes and dislikes, and design a scheme in accord with her

partialities. But, after all, a guest might try a little bit to fit into the life of the home visited.

"I'll not be sorry when she goes," Jean thought, rather petulant. "I'm sure I can't help the weather," she said aloud and could, as they say, have bitten off her tongue.

She had not seen Mary for five years. Five years ago she had stayed a night with her in London. They had been at college together, and at college were excellent friends. This long-deferred visit of Mary's was serving, chiefly, to impress upon Jean the somewhat depressing fact that friends, separated and reunited, may have little but the sentiment of "*auld lang syne*" to temper the pain of frustrated attempt at converse. Mary of twenty-six was not Mary of college. She was not even, it seemed, Mary of five years ago, though to be sure in that one evening's reunion diversities of taste and, above all, of outlook might easily have been glossed over.

Jean could offer her guest mountains that she loved herself, lend her a bathing-suit (she having come without one), and provide a boat in which to go upon the loch. "Oh, rowing is such weary work!" said Mary. Jean agreed, and stepped the mast, and hoisted the lug-sail, and terrified her old friend, for on these inland lochs the squalls can be both abrupt and violent. Coming inshore after one careening of the boat that was appalling to her guest Jean, unaware of their diversity of tastes regarding the risk of a ducking, told her to sit still. She had only landed to cull some large stones for ballast! And fishing! Jean's guest could not see the fun of swishing a line over a stream again and again till her arm ached, all for the pleasure of drawing forth from its element a small fish. Were there no fishmonger's shop in the village? She had, however, brought her riding habit. But even riding here was lacking in gusto. She preferred Rotten Row.

And as for this horrible storm. . . .

"I assure you I can't help the weather," Jean had just said rather petulantly, and then felt she could have bitten off her tongue, when the door opened and the parlour-maid came in.

"Mr. Barclay, miss," she said.

Mary, at the window, turned quickly. Divested of his rain-coat, there stood Robert very radiant; and Jean, depressed by her guest's so obvious depression, went running toward him.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Barclay," she said.

Robert had always liked Jean when visits to the Broughtons' had brought them together. The colour of her cheeks was as of ruddy apples; what's called rude health she possessed, and grace with it. Her eyes were clear. She took the place for him, in sophisticated circles, that Mary had taken at Pebble Glen. To be sure she had never thumped him on the back but she was at ease with him always.

"Isn't it a great day!" he ejaculated. "The postman left your letters at the Broughtons' by mistake, and I thought I'd better come over with them."

He kept his eyes on Jean that he might not stare like a gauche yokel at the vision of beauty behind her—the girl in the window recess.

"He is careless. Well, I'm glad he left them so as to give you an excuse to come over. Only this morning mother put two and two together and wondered if Mr. and Mrs. Broughton were there. Smoke from the chimneys now and again might mean only drying and airing by Mrs. Campbell. Smoke every day looked as if we would have to pay our formal welcoming call."

It was all he could do to keep his eyes from the girl in the window recess. Her loveliness smote him on his entrance. Here was the Venus of Melos, he thought, and with her lost arms! And these eyes—they shared the blue of pansies!

"Oh——" Jean interrupted herself. "Let me intro-

duce Mr. Barclay, Mary. Miss Chadwick." As they bowed she continued: "Miss Chadwick is staying with us for a little while. She comes from London."

"You are having a wild day," said Robert. "But it is great to be out in it."

"It must be," said Mary Chadwick. "Jean was just saying we should take a walk. We've been watching the storm from the window."

Her beauty was almost unbearable to him. Tall, with perfect poise, every line of her a thing of loveliness . . .

"Did you see that enormous cloud?" he asked Jean.

"Yes, rather. Wasn't it grand?" said she.

To her astonishment Mary Chadwick agreed.

"Wasn't it *wonderful*?" she exclaimed. "Looming up and soaring over the hills."

"I never saw anything like that storm-light," declared Robert.

"Do come and look at it now," invited Mary Chadwick.

Robert handed the letters to Jean as the other and so agitating girl swept back to the window. They followed her. She stood a few steps in advance of them, looking out with rapt expression.

"Isn't—it—glorious!" she brought out.

Letters in hand Jean frowned, puzzled. She glanced at Robert. He was not looking at the scene. He was staring at that exquisitely modelled face. Jean's eyes went left-right, left-right from one to the other.

"Don't you love it, Jean?" asked Mary, slipping an arm for a moment round her friend's waist.

"Y-yes," said Jean but in a tone of so little enthusiasm (she was thinking of other things) that Robert felt disappointed in her.

Her lovely guest was the girl for him. She could appreciate that display. Custom, he thought, perhaps staled the beauty of such landscape and skyscape for

Jean. And, he told himself, this beautiful Mary Chadwick admired without gush, vivaciously, spontaneously, naturally.

Such was their meeting.

CHAPTER XXIV

To Robert's joy there was a brave attempt at a red sunset. Might it be dry on the morrow and on the next day. For Jean Scott had invited him to a picnic party on that day if, as she said, their part of Scotland was sufficiently dry for them to sit down upon. Taffy was coming—Taffy Todd, whom he must remember from former visits to Loch Lomond. Yes, he remembered Taffy. And Lottie Moor and Jack Stuart—did he remember them? Well, they were engaged to be married. They were coming. Just a little party. She did so want Mary Chadwick, before she went, to see the view from Ben Tulloch.

He recalled the words "before she went." They troubled him with a trouble something like that he used to feel going to look in at some window at a desirable thing of price beyond him, dreading lest it had been removed in the re-dressing of the window or bought by some luckily wealthy person. A heron flapped heavily past below the road, down by the lochside, and he turned indoors, knocking out his after-dinner pipe.

Mrs. Campbell had lit the reading lamp on the table by the hearth and a small fire smouldered in the grate, not sufficient to overheat the room yet to dissipate the chill of that drenching day's residual damp. Under the reading lamp he did not read. He could not read, because of that guest of the Scotts'. Mary, her name was.

Elbow on table, hand propping head, he sat brooding on her loveliness. Mary . . . He frowned, but not

because of his first Mary, Mary of the Glen. What, he wondered, would Mary Chadwick think were she to know of the second Mary—those dank stairs, that leering and genial hag with the one eye, all the surroundings there?

He rose and paced the room slowly, without perceptible sound, then sat down again. Her face was before him and something in the modelling of chin and cheek-bones, he realised, was painfully like that of the other—of Helen, Helen of the Factories. They had the same kind of beauty. Helen, in another sphere, would have been still more like Mary Chadwick. The observation was gratifying: with his second Mary, with Helen of the Factories, he had been seeking for this loveliness! Sophistical, perhaps, but he toyed with the sophistry.

Restlessness came instead of restfulness. He rose again and looked out, cupping his hands to his head on either side to see beyond the reflected lamp in the polished window-glass, and there was a moon, by the illusion racing to meet innumerable little silver-edged clouds, the ripples left from the day. The radiance faded. It was darkened. It came again and the moon careered, atilt, across another patch of space.

He went downstairs and taking hat and stick started out for a walk. It led him past the Scotts' gate and on to a knoll beyond from which he could see the house, or at least the various straight-edged segments of light that were of its lit windows. A branch of intervening tree waved and for a moment he thought some one had come to a window the light of which it partially eclipsed.

Was it she? Was it she looking out at the night as he had looked? Well might she come out for a walk under that flying moon, she who had loved that day's rending of clouds and the storm-lights on the moors—and could also, no doubt, love a great city, love the faces too, passing by. Was he, as in the legend of Adam, longing for a help-meet at a moment of his life

when he had stopped to take stock, to reflect and, perhaps, to journey on ?

The branch waved again and he knew there was no one looking out. It was only a waving bough that had deluded him in his fervid state. That discovery made at the second waving of it, and ratified beyond doubt by another, he knew only that it was chilly, damp there. He trudged back, past the gates again, to go home, considering that she would belike be playing cards with the others indoors.

But almost at Broughton's again he turned. He had heard a dog bark. Jean often came out in the evening with the dogs for a smart walk along the high-road. If she came to-night she would no doubt be accompanied by her friend. He returned to the knoll and loitered there while the wind roared and passed in the trees—like waves on an uninhabited island, he thought—and then suddenly wheeling he walked vigorously, not to be deflected again by any intense fevered hope of seeing her that night, home.

Quiet was in the house, accentuated by the slow tick of the tall clock in the hall. He returned to the waiting reading lamp and the dark circular shadow under the round table on which it stood. The glimmering room offered him peace, tranquillity, could he but see. He leant against the mantel, thinking, not now of the past but of his present.

At last, at last, he had come to a time in his life when money was not a source of unceasing perplexity, worry. He had, besides, commissions to fulfil. Twenty-eight years of age. He had done pretty well, after all, but with what sacrifices ! The lisp of a piece of coal dropping through the bars into the ash-pan below was relatively loud in the room, the room so quiet.

Beauty : that was all that mattered. So said this artist to himself. To pass it on—that was the artist's justification, the cause of his being here whether on a journey to the cemetery only or beyond.

"She is beautiful," he said, aloud. "To look at her after having looked at Hatrick for days on end is healing for the eyes."

It did not occur to him that he thought of her but pictorially. What was at home behind her eyes, that were of a blue of the sky on the fairest summer noon, he did not consider. Thinking of her loveliness again he ended that day.

CHAPTER XXV

THE day of the picnic was dry, the hills in fact tinder dry on their shoulders and slopes.

"We'll be able to sit down on Scotland to-day," was Jean's first remark, meeting him at the door on his arrival. "Mary says she has not been able to sit down on Scotland since she came, even on dry days. Here's a basket for you to carry."

"If she stays a little longer," Robert responded, "she may see a month on end of dry days, and even smell sun-scorched heather and bracken. No mists, just purple hills and silver streams."

His eyes were momentarily blinded as he said that. Jean watched him with her serious frown and wondered what that expression signified. He interested her—this friend of the Broughtons. She had observed that look in his eyes before, occasionally. Unaware what it meant, the glimpsing of it yet always inexplicably moved her, made her feel—absurd emotion!—sorry for him, almost motherly toward him! Yes, an absurd emotion—to pity at a venture, without any evidence of cause for pity! Why should a momentary unseeing gaze of the eyes, a fleeting look of remoteness of spirit create a sense of pity?

"She can't do that—wait for the halcyon weather," she said. "She has to leave us on Saturday."

"On Saturday," he muttered.

"She has already put it off. She had already arranged to go last—oh, here's Taffy."

Taffy was the son of what's called a "gentleman farmer," was just over twenty, and was as a young brother to Jean.

"How do you do, sir?" he said to Robert.

That manner of address made Robert feel old, or at least elderly.

"Ma-ry! Come along."

Mary Chadwick appeared, running down the stairs. She caught the knob at the end of the banisters and swung round into the hallway. The Victory of Samothrace was but a "big lump" in comparison, thought Robert.

"Come along," said Jean. "Lottie and Jack will be waiting for us now."

Waiting they were, very happily "sitting on Scotland" by the highway where an old climbing track debouched. The moors were dry. Only in the hollows moss-hags showed their pools and the party soon mounted beyond these. Cresting a roll where outcrops of rock thrust through, friable slatey-hued rocks, patinated with mica gleams, what seemed a rock firm enough to serve as a step crumbled under Mary's feet and she fell backward.

Taffy and Robert together leapt to her aid, and Jean was amused at the bitter look that Taffy launched at the artist who was first, restoring her balance. A hobbledehoy still, poor Taffy, though a nice hobbledehoy. It was really funny to see him infatuated with her lovely friend. Catching Mary's eye Jean shot her a private twinkle over that obvious gloom of jealousy and Mary's eyelids, in response, drooped to hide her own amusement. Taffy was funny because his trouble would pass. There could be nothing in it. Mary Chadwick was twenty-six; Taffy was but turned twenty.

They mounted to a little quaking pool in an upper diminutive valley or dimple of the hills, a pool made

of the twisting of a burn in that hollow. There Taffy played gillie, spreading the table-cloth and putting stones on its corners.

"I'll race you to that knoll and back," said Jean, and set off.

The others pursued her. Her athletic ankles flickered ahead under her billowy frock. Frocks, even tramping frocks, were long in those days.

"Oh, I can't out-run Jean," Mary Chadwick cried, and dropped behind, Taffy chivalrously stopping.

Lottie and Jack, up and down over the declivities and whipping through the heather tussocks, panted level with Robert.

"You have to go round this stone!" Jean shouted, wheeling round it as she spoke.

Robert rushed round it and was upon the home stretch in pursuit, made up on her, passed her and as he did so held an arm out.

"Want to be towed?" he asked.

She grabbed the hand and he continued in a leaping run till Jean, almost horizontal behind, was like a child dragged by a demented coursing nursemaid. Whooping laughter, she tripped but valiantly lurched after him, with frantic plunges of her feet in the higher spots of that bumpy track to retain equilibrium.

Beside the hamper Mary, watching them, sat on Taffy's coat. Tinder dry the soil there, but Taffy would have it so with recollection, perhaps, of a story of Raleigh and Queen Bess.

"You are like a runaway horse," Jean panted to Robert, regaining the perpendicular. "Well, that's good practice if ever I do get dragged by a horse. My goodness, where did you learn such a heather-step, such a heather-run?"

Had she been Mary of Pebble Glen she would have spanked him then, thumped him on the back with a fist. They were very good friends. Lottie and Jack, who "also ran," subsided to earth and Lottie, happily

engaged, in her happiness match-making for others, looked from Robert to Jean and thought how well they would get on together.

It was after lunch, when they were packing their baskets again, that Jean, who would keep her loved hills tidy and was busily gathering the fragments of paper, observed something which she was to remember. It was a look. It was a look that Robert gave her friend. Mary was holding the hamper with the lid open and, in replacing the cups, Robert's hand had touched hers. Jean had not noticed that, though it was the cause of the glance she was to remember.

Robert's heart accelerated its beats. He gave a sharp intake of breath. A glance at that incarnate loveliness, a glance returned and quickly hid with a drooping of eyelids: that's what Jean saw; but she did not try to catch her old friend's eye to toss a knowing twinkle of amusement. Robert was not Taffy. Lottie and Jack had moved away a few paces and were looking over the hills. Taffy was folding the table-cloth neatly. Jean, dropping the last of the paper into a basket, stared into distance.

"You are lost in thought," said Mary Chadwick.

Jean looked down at her.

"Oh, I love looking over that view," she said.

As for Robert—he was consumed with desire for private speech with this living loveliness. But short of ordering Jean and Taffy, Lottie and Jack to remove themselves from the scene, or to remain with the luncheon baskets while he and Miss Chadwick went for a further ramble, what could be done about it? All that could be said in favour of this picnic now was that it permitted him to see her, to look at her. But even in public he made an advance.

"It seems so odd to hear 'Miss Chadwick' to right of me and 'Miss Chadwick' to left of me," said Jean suddenly. "You and Taffy 'Miss Chadwicking.' Do tell them to call you Mary."

"That reminds me," said Robert. "I hope I don't seem curious, but I noticed that the letters for you I brought over the other day were addressed 'Miss M. C. Chadwick.' What does the C stand for?"

"Cynthia," said she.

"I shall call you Cynthia," he answered airily.

Had they been alone it would have been spoken in other tones. As it was that remark, in accent as casual as one uses speaking of the weather, caused Jean to look at him sharply. Item number two for her to remember!

Mary Chadwick might not have heard. When they rose, leaving the luncheon baskets in temporary possession of some gathering and curious wasps, to continue to the top of the hill, Robert thought her silence was sign of resentment. Perhaps he had been (as the heroines in the novels of an earlier generation were in the habit of saying to their swains) *too sudden*.

But he would not be snubbed. He had more than that to say. He regarded her aslant as they walked, she at his side, but her head turned from his, addressing the others. He felt like the men in the wild pictures (for a certain public, laughed at by the Raeburn students in passing the windows where they were exposed for sale) of terrific thewy men in helmets and goatskins, armed with bloody swords, carrying off upon their shoulders great gross beauties with rent shifts and streaming yellow hair.

He was not snubbed. He had coveted in his penurious days frail things of porcelain out of China, and gloated on them till, others buying, they disappeared from the windows. Cynthia (he was calling her Cynthia to himself already) had a porcelain quality. About her cheeks and chin there were exquisite delicate porcelain effects.

Jean, watching this, was not too dense to read the significance of his gaze. With Taffy it had been funny. With Robert it was not funny. This all might lead to more than the whistling, or *sotto voce* hissing, or

absent-minded humming of airs of her songs, in abstracted moments. They were too nearly of an age. She did not think they were suited. She did not know, besides, if Robert was making money. She had an impression that, if he were, it was a new experience to him. And Mary Cynthia Chadwick's price was far beyond rubies. She would be costly. He would have to work like the mischief, she considered, to clothe her and provide entertainment for her. She recalled the words of an uncle of hers regarding a marriage for beauty in his family: "You might just as well eat a bird for its song as marry a woman for her looks." The Broughtons, her loved neighbours, were dangerous. So obviously happy were they that, she was sure, there had been young people, who, seeing their connubial felicity, cast round for some one to marry before the real right mate appeared. She had once charged them with that unconscious crime and, laughing, they promised her that next time any young sentimentalist visited them they'd have a mock battle to dissuade him, or her, from rushing forth in urgent haste to wed at a venture. This would not be a wedding like the Broughtons'. She hoped that her friend's marked ignoring of Robert was indeed and in truth evidence that she had not liked that remark of his about her name.

Mary Cynthia had truly heard, and truly she had understood. At the hill-crest they all bowed to a wind skimming its top. Her skirts whipped about her legs as she were involved in a sack-race. She staggered and to recover balance caught Robert's arm. For a delirious moment he had the information that she was not indignant at his *suddenness*. Nothing! Nothing at all. Just one hand clutching his arm while the other struggled with the folds of her skirt. Yet he was elated as though they had a secret understanding.

Down at the main road again in the quiet of the valley, the evening wind sending high clouds scurrying

but hardly moving the lochside copses, Lottie and Jack left them. Taffy came all the way with them.

"I wish you could all come to dinner with me," said Robert, as they drew near to the Scotts' gate. "I can assure you that Mrs. Campbell is as expert as a chef at sudden notice, and—"

"It can't be done," replied Jean. "Mary has made a lot of friends while here. Dinner out to-night. Tea out to-morrow, and dinner again. We're only going to have her to breakfast with us after that, and then she's gone."

"I'm sorry," he said, and his hand at that moment encountering Mary Cynthia's he caught it. He pressed it.

"So am I," said she, and returned the pressure that not even the doting, the funnily doting, Taffy saw.

CHAPTER XXVI

ROBERT was the first to arrive at the station on the morning of her going. On the platform, void save for one upended truck down the handles of which small bright globules of dew ran and dropped, he strode to and fro, preoccupied. Muffled for him that morning was the chortling of blackbirds taking off from the plashy grass and slanting up into the trees. To and fro, hands behind back, walking-stick pendant, he walked.

A nervous clip-clop of horse's hoofs broke out. And there she was, or her head and shoulders, in rapid transit beyond a curve of hedge. Before Robert could return to the road the trap had halted, the groom (who had been sitting erect to the rear, arms folded) was adroitly at the horse's head, and Mr. Scott was handing Cynthia down. Annoyance number one: he should have waited out there on the road.

His expression then, it is conceivable, was not utterly unlike that of Taffy's when that young man saw Mary

Cynthia attended by him. There was a glint of banter, he thought, in Mr. Scott's eyes as he gave him good-morning. No pause then between the leading lady's arrival and that of the unwanted supers. A cheery hail from behind came to them.

"Well, we did get here just as soon as you!"

Mrs. Scott and Jean had walked across from the house by a field-path. And then—

"Damn! *Tout le monde! Tout le monde!*" Robert muttered to himself.

Mary Cynthia, it appeared, was to hold a reception for adieux. Still they came. The scene made Robert think of a swarming of bees about their queen. The crackle of voices exasperated him. Strangers arriving, not local people (or, if so, out of the Scotts' circle), admired the queen while feignedly looking past her along the track to see if the semaphore's arm was down heralding the train's approach. Men executed slow parades, quarter-deck walks, obviously, it seemed to Robert, to hear her voice in passing as well as admire her in distance.

He stood outside the chattering circle that surrounded her. With this loveliness he would go on. The sense of disappointment in his journey, of having come to a halt, her beauty dissipated. Something undefined he had needed, under a cloud, aware of a lack, and then he had met her. With her he would go on.

To join in the idle chatter there was no need. He stood by, erect, hands behind back, stick depending. The address on the labels affixed to her baggage—a pyramid of suit-cases, hat-boxes—was imprinted on his mind. He looked up and found Mrs. Scott studying him. The porter had selected the luggage of Mary Cynthia for special attention, and deferentially gathered it on his truck. The train came in. The station-master hustled into prominence (important of bearing as his little way-station were the *Gare de Lyon*), and noting

to which carriage Mr. Scott stepped hurried thither and held the door open.

"Come along, m'dear," said Mr. Scott, and circled an arm in air behind Cynthia.

Robert had his plan. All others, except Mrs. Scott and Jean, could say their adieux. He would be last but for them. And it seemed that his intention was understood by Mary Cynthia.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

She looked past him to others, touched their outheld hands. A horror seized him that she was, at the end, going to ignore him. He stepped quickly toward her. Her hand was in his.

"Good-bye"—he paused—"Cynthia."

A light flashed in the pupils of those blue eyes. That which was at home behind these windows understood, responded. The finger-tips of Mr. Scott's hand touched her shoulder, for the guard stood by, whistle to lips, flag ready to wave. She was in the carriage and the door was shut. The whistle sounded. The station-master wiped his hands of them all and strutted away.

She was gone. There was a scurrying and agitation of dropped shreds of paper between the rails. She was gone. But Robert had given her a signal; he had given her a sign.

Passing out of the little station to the road where the assorted conveyances stood he heard the departing chatter of talk. It reminded him of a great egg-laying morning at Pebble Glen. He had a thought, too late, that caused him to execrate his ineptness. He smote at a grass tuft with his stick as though it were to blame. He ought to have packed his belongings last night, explained to Mrs. Campbell that he had received a letter that day calling him to Glasgow, and travelled down with her. Too late!

He looked back along the line over which the train

had gone in a cutting between two slopes of grass pranked with dandelions. Even the dust and stray shreds of paper at the station between the rails had ceased to flutter in the draught after its departure. Too late ! What a damned fool ! It would have been simplicity itself. He could have casually told Jean, when she arrived, of the unexpected letter and remarked that he'd be able to look after her friend's change of trains at Glasgow and see her on her way. Mr. Scott, going to his office, would have renounced her to his care. Damn !

“ Will you walk home with us ? ”

Jean's voice brought him from his self-reproach, his rage at his own incompetence.

“ Oh, I thought you'd be driving back,” said he.

“ No. We've sent the trap back. It's such a lovely morning mother would like to walk.”

“ Delighted,” said he.

“ Field-path ? ”

“ Surely. Delighted.”

Mrs. Scott spoke and he had to apologise. He did not catch what she said. To the repetition of her remark he answered foolishly.

“ He loves her blindly, he's infatuated,” said Jean when he had left them.

“ Who ? Oh, how dense I am ! Was that the cause of his odd, his peculiar manner ? Blindly ? Isn't it strange for an artist to love a woman blindly ? But what a lovely hostess she would make for a painter entering upon his social period.”

“ She is very pretty,” agreed Jean.

“ Pretty, dear ? A beautiful woman. I have never seen a more lovely woman. And her taste in dress . . . ”

Jean said no more. She was thinking of Robert's arrival (somehow it seemed long ago, though but five days before) with the letters for them that had been left at the Broughtons' by some silly mistake of that silly postman. She recalled all that Mary (that is to

say Cynthia) had been saying about the day, and the rain, before he came, and what she had said after he came. Of course there are those who play chameleon merely as an aid to easy converse. But that gushing talk about the wonderful way ! That was not only an avoidance of argument over so slight a subject as that of weather. It was misleading.

She could not get that incident, that about-face of Mary's, out of her head. To mention it in tones of reprobation would be to ninety-nine auditors out of a hundred, she considered, like making a mountain out of a molehill. At any rate she would not mention it to a soul.

" I think it would be an excellent match," said Mrs. Scott.

" I—I am not so sure."

" Why not, Jean ? "

" I don't know. I just feel that."

CHAPTER XXVII

AN irresistible impulse had once caused Robert Barclay to leave his little box of a room out New City Road way and set off, ostensibly for Lennox's, in search of the second Mary whom he called Helen. An irresistible impulse made him close his studio flat and go to London after the third Mary whom he called Cynthia.

He had many friends there. Wilton, the one-time student at Raeburn's who had introduced him to Robert Fairly, was in London, the chief and most hard-working artist in the studio of a great advertising concern. Apart from that he was a flower painter. But though painters knew his achievements there was no wide public for pictures of flowers. They were not even in the world of silver-points of pretty nymphs. And he had to exist as well as live.

He would not allow Robert to go back to his hotel

when, the day after his arrival, the younger man visited him. Wilton's home in Chelsea had to be Barclay's centre. Fairly (who had introduced Robert to Anticoli-Corrado) he dropped in upon the next day while Wilton was working. Fairly was conducting, in summer, a class in the Cotswolds, in winter one in Camden Town, and in between times himself painting just what he wanted to paint. By happy chance he had returned to London for a day from Shropshire when Robert sought him out.

They lunched in a restaurant, a little crowded room, from the window of which over the lace curtains that veiled its lower half Robert saw a plaque on a house opposite : "Here Hazlitt died." Hazlitt knew about painting, and had painting friends, and perhaps dabbled in it himself. The seething life round him in cities, the immaterial jostling with ghosts he loved as greatly as the purple tranquillity of moors under the call of a peewit. Life in its every manifestation was wonderful, and to meet old friends, and find that friendship endured, gave a sense of joy that had been dulled for him of late, helped him to escape from a depression that, at the slightest opportunity, insinuated itself.

It would appear that something restrained him from making a call at his Cynthia's home. Hardly possible that he was just pretending to himself that he was in London to see these men. He was in the state of that troubled one who, calling upon his priest for advice regarding a course of action or inaction, was told by that wise man, wise as Solomon, to listen to the bells and hear what they said, whether "Do it, do it!" or "Don't, don't!" Robert had slightly allayed his fever by coming thus far. Now he realised that he was at the end of a period. Should he go on alone? Could he go on alone?

Chance, or Destiny, stepped in. Four days after he came to London he met Cynthia. Wilton, to visit a flower show, took a day off and Robert accompanied

him. It was not, as it soon became evident, only a flower show. It was a social function. It was the "right thing" to go there, to be seen there.

Cynthia's hand caressing the air over a carnation was the first he saw of her. Wilton, undeflected by any mere human beings, was looking at the carnations. Robert saw the hand, looked to the face, and his eyes across the banked colour drew hers. She gave a start of pleasure and he hurried round to meet her.

"What are you doing here?" she asked. "This is most unexpected."

"I have come to London to see you," he replied.

At sight of her he knew. He spoke quietly. She looked deep in his eyes. She seemed to search there for something, very seriously.

"Are you here with friends?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, afterwards—where could I meet you; see you?"

"You are with friends too, aren't you?" she said.

"A friend."

"I shall be leaving mine after lunch."

"Meet me then," he demanded, and as she still gazed with that deep questioning seriousness into his eyes: "I was going to make a formal call," he explained, "but now that we have met like this—meet me again somewhere, after—"

"I will," she promised with an abruptness of sudden decision, a plunge taken. "I know. There is a Scotch place. Oat cakes, thin potato-scones, soda-scones dusted with flour, red-cheeked Scots waitresses with the lilt you know in their voices. Four o'clock. I'll wait just outside."

She gave full directions and fled away to her friends again.

"Forgive me," he said, returning to Wilton. "I have not seen her for some time."

Wilton either did not know Robert had left him for

those moments or thought it of no consequence. He was otherwise occupied than with feminine loveliness, or an apology from a friend who had left the flowers and him for an aside with it. He was standing four-square, grim of jaw but with a dream in his eyes, looking at the carnations. He was muttering to himself. He turned to Robert and quoted :

“ ‘ Soon will the high midsummer pomps come on,
Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,
Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,
Sweet William with his homely cottage smell . . . ’

O man, if I could paint flowers as Arnold wrote *The Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis* then I’d be content. ‘ Roses that down the alleys shine afar,’ ” he murmured.

He looked at his watch, said : “ We’ll have to be going,” and led the way to a restaurant, up dusky stairs to a floor where were old “ pews ” between high partitions, and over steak and chip potatoes and creamed cauliflower they sat, ale beside each in a pewter tankard, not only for the right savour of the beer but for a sentiment of old England and generations of pewter tankards. While they talked of this and that each had his own dream at the back of his mind—Wilton’s of carnations and how to put them on canvas, Robert’s of Cynthia.

He was at the appointed place ahead of time. He looked in, but no Cynthia was there. And then there she came swinging down Bond Street. It seemed the flags over the doors here and there were out for her.

“ There you are,” said he.

“ Here I am,” said she.

He held the swing-door open for her entrance. Her proximity was ecstasy for him. She passed upstairs before him, gathering her frock with a movement of grace, and looking round saw a corner table in a window niche.

They could see along Piccadilly thence. They could see the twinkle of polished brass on harness. The sunlight between railings, rippling along the backs of people on the further pavement, they could see. Or she could see all that, the busy scene, the sort of scene that was necessary for her to feel alive. She needed crowds. She needed the stir of others round her to have a sense of living herself.

Robert saw only her. She withdrew a white glove and laid it on the table with a movement that charmed him. A rosy-cheeked lass (as she had promised) took their order, and they talked of Jean, and of how Cynthia had loved her visit to Scotland, till the waitress returned with scones and pats of butter and pigmy jars of jam.

"Don't you love these?" said Cynthia. "I adore them." She toyed with one. "Not but what I might get tired of them if I had to earn a living by filling them, day in, day out—or, worse, putting the little paper caps on them day after day."

She wondered why he seemed suddenly lost, remote, though just across the table from her. He was thinking, no doubt, she suspected, of what he had to say to her, of what he had come from Glasgow to say. But the moment was not ripe. The waitress would be back again.

Her remark about the jam-pot covers had been mere table-talk, filling a gap till all was in order before them and the waitress finally gone. And lo, he was suddenly diffident. She was disappointed. This was not the man who had said in that definite quick voice, that he had come to London to see her. She would have to speak. She would have to help him.

"What," she asked, looking negligently out of the window at the polychromic movement of hats and sunshades along the street below, "did you want to say to me?"

He sat back and laid a hand on the table. By the pose it might seem to any who glanced thither that

nothing of great import was taking place there, nothing being said to any purpose. He spoke to the table-cloth, raising his eyes now and then to hers.

"I want you always with me." Having said that he stopped, smoothed an insignificant crease out of the cloth. "I cannot go on with my work without you. I keep thinking and thinking of you. I'm entering a new period in my life. I feel it, I know it. I meet you now, at that moment." He paused. "Will you—Cynthia—I'd like to have you always with me. Will you?"

His earlier hesitancy had had its effect on her. And here was an extraordinary proposal, as much about his life, his work, as about her. Had he as ardently spoken then as (so recently, but an hour or two ago, at that flower show) he had sought occasion to speak she might have answered otherwise. But there had been a hitch. The cause of it was beyond her. She was not a thought-reader. She had been compelled to draw from him the speech he had wanted to make, come so far to make. She followed impulse. She had nothing else to follow. His manner of the casual she imitated. She picked up her glove and examined it as though to see that the stitching held, and—

"I don't know," she said.

Robert folded his arms and stared at nothing across the room.

"Oh, it's no use here," he said. "A private talk in all this buzzing gathering! I shall wait in London till you say yes." Then, as though to himself: "There is no use going back without that. I would only come down again. I'd be demented going away without—"

"Were you not going to look me up?" she asked.
"How long have you been in London?"

"I was going to call. Four days I've been here. I went first to a friend who has been begging me to come and stay with him for years now. Oh, yes, indeed I was going to call."

"I shall tell mother of meeting you, then, and she can write to you."

"All right," he snapped as though that would satisfy him for the moment. "That's a bargain," he said.

His voice rose on the words. The quality of their utterance made them ring out so that both started and glanced toward those at neighbouring tables.

She liked him tremendously then. She almost said: "Oh, yes, yes. The answer is yes." If he had only asked her once more, then and there, it would have been settled. That frank manner, that directness, the way he said "That's a bargain," moved her greatly. It did not occur to her that it was as a friend she would like to have him, a frank friend. He had said "That's a bargain," just as he would with a man over some discussion, and that was the moment when she felt near him.

"All right," she said. "I think I'll have to go now. Your address?"

She did not even look at him as he spoke it.

"I'll remember," she said.

"I won't give your memory the chance to play tricks with me," he said.

He took out a card and wrote Wilton's address on it. Odd how even little actions seem impregnated with significance. There was a woman sitting at a neighbouring table who, noticing that writing on the card and the surrender of it, sat staring at Robert, markedly unaware that she stared. She had the feeling that something out of the ordinary had been transacted at that table in the window-recess. But his voice ("That's a bargain,") had already oddly pierced the immediate talk at her table. Cumulative evidence she had. She had noticed the glance, almost as of alarm, of these two—the lovely young woman, the rather sombre and restrained-looking young man—when his voice definitely and vigorously made public a fragment of their

private colloquy. She watched them as they passed out. Lives are being shaped all round us, she thought. Their faces were impressed on her mind's eye.

When they emerged again into the street the buses passing westward were all packed with the beginning of the homing business crowds. People standing at the corners waved in vain seeing the buses they waited for go by in the stream of the traffic. The drivers ignored them, the conductors balanced to rear either ignored or made pantomime signifying that their conveyances were full to capacity.

"Will you walk or drive?" he asked.

"Oh, it's too far to walk. Besides, they will be wondering what is keeping me."

A hansom driver raised his whip in an inquiring salute and she nodded. The cab drew in to the kerb. . . .

That night, talking with Wilton, his friend suddenly interrupted himself with an "Oh!"

"What?"

"Happy thought, Bob. I see the studio a few doors along the street is empty, and a board out—*To Let*. You should get the keys to-morrow and have a look at it. At the present stage of your career, my boy, London would be good for you. I met one of my bosses to-day. Chief shareholder in London Publicity Company. I mentioned I'd been at the flower show with you. Perked up his ears. Wants to meet you. I could see business in the back of his eyes. 'That man's portraits,' says he, 'are going to be worth money, they tell me.' So I told him they were worth money *right now* as Americans say. Sir Henry Vat. You know the name. Our company is only a side-line to him, one of his other irons in the fire. He's the booze man, you know."

"I've never heard of him."

Wilton sat back and laughed.

"Oh, dear!" he exclaimed. "You've heard of all manner of obscure Dutch painters, as well as the

acknowledged eminent. You've heard of the shadowed Spanishmen, shadowed by their Velasquez. You know the names and work of eclipsed French painters. But I don't believe you know the name of the present prime minister."

Robert looked guilty.

"I'm right!" whooped Wilton. "Oh, I don't blame you. I don't believe you could say off-hand, and for certain, what is the number of our own present reigning monarch, Edward."

"What does he look like?" Robert asked.

"Look like!" This was too much for Wilton. "Well you must, at any rate, have seen Pryde's portrait of him."

"Oh, has James Pryde done his portrait?"

"Good God, what are we getting at?" wailed Wilton.

"You are speaking of Sir Henry Vat, aren't you?"

"Let us," said Wilton. "What a tangle we got into."

"Has he a Falstaffian nose?" asked Robert.

"Why should he have?"

"Well, you said he was a boozer."

"Still tangled!" exclaimed Wilton. "When I said *booze* I meant *beer*. He is the Vat of Vat's Beer."

"Oh, now I know! I had a bottle of that with some bread and cheese in a little pub when I was tramping one day—"

"Surely you did, wherever you were tramping. Now you've got him. That will be something to talk about when you are introduced."

As for the studio that was vacant along the street: after Wilton was off in the morning to his advertisements, Robert procured the key from the agent in King's Road that he might have a look at the inside. There was a wrought-iron lamp over the door that made him feel he'd like the place. Plans for the future he had none; but to see the interior of the studio house, as

the agent told him graciously handing him the key, did not in any way commit him.

“What a place to work in,” he thought as he walked in its big studio, looked out of the windows at a glimpse between gables, of the Thames’ grey ribbon with copper flakes dancing in it.

With the windows all closed it was as quiet as a mausoleum. He sat down on a settee before the northward window and was lost in thought. A complete change. That was the thing. He would get rid of the feeling of having halted by an entire change of scene. At last, after the penurious years, he had some money. Financial worry was over. He would begin afresh.

He cleared his throat and an echo answered from the ceiling. He was smitten with a sense of unutterable loneliness. He felt that it was his place to act, not to await what life had to give him. That he had been working hard for years, and overworking indeed, and still needed rest, did not occur to him. He called himself slack. He should be up and doing. He would take his place in life instead of being but an onlooker.

He returned to Wilton’s. The benign old housekeeper gave him entrance and he went to the telephone, his mind made up. He obtained his connection, and in response to an answer in an unknown voice, he inquired :

“Is Miss Chadwick at home?”

“Mrs. Chadwick? Mrs. Chadwick is out.”

“Miss Mary Chadwick.”

“Just a moment, please.”

There was the sound of a step on tiles, and then her voice—disembodied, adorable in his ears.

“Hullo.”

“Cynthia,” he said.

“Oh, it’s you.”

“Yes. I say, I can’t wait till I—I can’t wait to see you. I’ve been looking over a studio. I’m thinking of staying in London awhile. I’d like your opinion on the studio before I settle. Do you hear?”

" Yes, quite well."

" Are you busy this morning ? If I call for you in a hansom will you come along with me and look at it ? "

" Where are you speaking from ? "

He told her.

" It would be a waste of time if you did that," she replied. " I'll come."

There was a smooth click.

" I'll wait here, then, shall I ? " he inquired.

No answer.

" Are you there, Cynthia ? "

She had gone.

As soon as the cab drew up he was at the kerb to meet her.

" Do we drive on or do I get out ? " she asked.

" You can get out. It is just along the street."

He looked up at the driver with an interrogative twitch of his eyebrows and being told, in response, the fare, gave him so generous a tip with it that the jehu realised that beyond peradventure it was a great moment in the young man's life.

" It is awfully nice of you to want me to see the place before you take it," said Cynthia, swinging along beside him.

The light tattoo of her heels on the pavement was a haunting rhythm for him. It tapped into his heart. He wanted that rhythm by his side always, always.

" Here we are."

" Oh, this blue door. *And* that lovely lamp ! "

He inserted the key in the lock and swung the door wide. It seemed a momentous opening to him. Here was not just opening a door. Here was symbol of a new beginning.

" One has to imagine it furnished," he said. " Furniture will stop odd echoes. Come into the studio first."

He preceded her, and at the studio door stood back for her to enter. The roar of London was all but excluded, subdued to a muffled hum.

"A beautiful room," said she. "I'd love to come and call on you here. What a charming place. And you have a little glimpse of the river, I see."

"Like the sort of thing Sam Broughton—you know his work—puts into even his portrait studies. A glimpse, a glimpse of big, everlasting things. A reminder. Cynthia, I might wait—but that river flowing past bothers me. Cynthia . . ."

Her eyes were as the eyes of one a little frightened. He put his hands behind his back, confronting her, stood very erect.

"I don't want to wait," he said. "Oh, my dear, I love your beauty so."

She moistened her lips.

"My beauty!" she said. "Don't you love me?"

"Why, your beauty and you are one," he cried out, and the ceiling echoed.

He did not understand that she had accepted him. She stood there nodding her head, nod-nodding, her lips close together. He thought there were tears in her eyes. Then she nodded again and he understood, and gathered her gratefully, passionately, in his arms.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT was shortly after their return from the honeymoon, their Italian pilgrimage that included, for a sentiment, Anticoli-Corrado, that they went to a party at the Sydney Heaths'—Cynthia's friends—who lived in The Temple. There it was that Robert met Harrison Jardine who, later, was to be to him a friend in need. Through Cynthia he met his friend against that hour of need.

A jingling hansom cab swayed them thither from their home as to music, for those were the days of London's lost orchestration: for cymbals, harness-bells and chains, for kettle-drums, the muffled pounding of hoofs on the wood-blocks of the streets, the era of

cacophony unimagined. They were part of a river of rhythms. The hoofs thudded. The harness chains played their dancing measure. The hansom swayed to the measure. They drew near to a crossing of thoroughfares and there a policeman urgently strode towards them from the street which, at right angles, crossed theirs. He held up a hand. He was conducting this orchestra. Their cab swayed to a halt. Its bells gave a final jingle and were still. The ribbon of traffic that had been coming towards them parallel, eastward, passed on. The last bus at its tail-end drew out from the kerb where it had stopped and went its way. Before them, with drums and bells, rolled a procession, set free, of buses and cabs and drays, one or two of these swerving aside into their street.

Robert sat forward toward the apron of their hansom, his jaw tense.

“I love it,” said Cynthia.

Engrossed, he made no reply. To one side was a four-wheeled cab, to the other a bus, its high-perched driver wearing a grey hat and a coat that made one think of Epsom Day, with heavy gloves, ribbed at the back. There, between the hansom and the bus, was a little low donkey-cart of rakish design. Its driver had his legs out-thrust on the shafts ; his heels were half-way along the donkey. He glanced at Robert and called up an unintelligible catch-word to the driver of the hansom, who ignored him. He called up then to the bus-driver, who glanced down his nose at him and furled the lash of his whip with an adroit twist neatly round the handle.

Robert sat back, less conspicuous. Their horse put a hind leg at ease and in the movement emitted a peal of bells that caused the policeman, whose broad back was motionless before them, to glance over his shoulder as might a conductor who had heard a wrong note, a lip-slip, or a note sounded by accident before the baton's rise. Then suddenly he dashed away diagonally

before them with a swift forward motion of one hand as though he would tug them and all the halted vehicles along with him. The other he raised peremptorily as he strode into a gap of the traffic that rolled before them. There was the springing on of brakes and the clicking to horses. Thud-thud, jingle-jingle. The thunder of their going broke out and with it the tintinabulation of harness-chains and the silvery ringing of harness-bells were orchestrated.

"I love it. I love it!" Cynthia repeated.

"'Ere we go! Away we go again! Two to one on the little one!"

It was the driver of the donkey-cart, raucously shouting to no one in particular.

Robert sat with compressed lips and puckered eyes looking at it all. The tail-end of the hurrying procession that had made its transit before them, delaying them there, was rocking and waggling away up the street they crossed, with an ebbing drumming, a receding tinkle. Their orchestra was again in the ascendancy, with pounding of hoofs and roll of wheels like subdued thunder, triangles and cymbals. The conductor at the crossing stolidly, imperiously, attentive no doubt yet seeming inattentive with usage, watched their procession pass.

Alighting from the cab and passing under the arch into the precincts they were met by a faint clinging smell of gas and of dank old earth recently turned. In the square before them were lanterns creating confusing shadows on flags and walls as much as a guiding radiance and giving the place, at first glance, the appearance of a farm steading, of an old inn-yard near the hour for the coach to come.

"What's up here?" asked Robert.

"The road's up!" said Cynthia.

There were holes in the ground; and that people might not fall into them they were fenced round by planks propped from a wheelbarrow to a mound of

earth, or from a stacked tripod of shovels to a pinch-bar jabbed between the cobbles on the flags. The lanterns had been hung beside these pits to warn pedestrians and prevent barked shins.

Cynthia had been to the Heaths' before but Robert never had, so hers it was to lead the way across the uncertain space of the inner court. The clip-clop of hoofs, the muffled kettle-drums, and the jingle of harness-chains sounded fainter there, no louder than the rustle of the half-revealed trees in the court. She crossed it among the uncertain glints and conflicting shadows. That transit brought her to a doorway.

"No lights on the stairs," she said. "Something wrong with the gas. Good thing I know the way up."

With a laugh she began to ascend. He heard the frou-frou of her skirts as she gathered them. A bangle clicked. Then she fumbled on the unlit stairs, feeling for a step, one hand behind to guide him. Their fingers locked.

"All right?" she asked.

"All right," he assured her.

"One would think they'd put a lamp on the stairs," said she. "Perhaps they don't know there isn't one."

"I haven't a match," said Robert, feeling for one.

"That's all right," she told him, and continued to ascend.

He had a thought in his mind then of what he had read of the pre-existence theory. It was as if vaguely he recalled a former life in an older London among unlit adventures. Fumbling they ascended.

"How many have we come up?" she asked. "Is this the second or the third landing?"

Her voice sounded strangely husky to him. The impression as of previous existence departed. He was overwhelmed with a definite memory.

"Third," he replied. "It's queer, this dark. Your voice sounds husky. Have you caught a cold?"

"I don't think so."

They stood close a moment.

"Yes, this is the third landing," said she.

He heard her heels go tip-tap ahead of him. He brushed against her and she caught and pressed his hand. He saw a thin pencilling of light from a keyhole in the darkness. What was this? Was he suddenly gone mad? Would a door open and an old crone with one eye . . .

"Here we are," said she.

She found the knocker, lifted, and dropped it. At once the door was opened by a young and comely maid-servant, and Robert saw an interior of lamps and candles in old brass stands, and an antique warming-pan on a wall, and a convex mirror making a miniature of the broken lights, distorting the Adam's ceiling to gather it within the frame.

Mrs. Heath appeared behind, crossing the hall.

"Oh, there you are, Mary," she said and then, because of the gloomy corridor behind them, glimpsed before the door was closed: "Is there no light out there? How do you do, Mr. Barclay? Look here, you boys," she called into a room, "you must get lamps or candles and set them on the landings. Put one on each window-sill." She turned back to her guests. "Is it not annoying? But it is rather charming to be back to candles."

She ushered them into the old sitting-room where others already were gathered and, some introductions over, apologised to those who'd had to fumble a way up.

"I did not know the stairs were dark," she said.

"Nothing to apologise over, Mrs. Heath. Lamb and Steele, old Johnson and link boys, and all that sort of thing." It was Harrison Jardine who spoke, taking a few paces to and fro in the room. "Quite jolly. Sets the clock back," he added.

Truly for Robert the clock had been set back. He'd had a dread that something pyschic, supernatural and

terrible had happened and that the door would open to an inquiry, revelations, a sort of night of judgment.

Music was the chief entertainment of the gathering. Much of it was music of the people. They were not being classical in the wonted sense. For the sake of a west-country guest, one from "down-along," there were Somerset folk-songs; and a long, lean, expatriate Scotsman drawled, to his own accompaniment, "The Bonnie Earl of Murray."

" Oh ! lang will his lady
 Look ow'r the castle downe,
 Ere she see the Earl of Murray
 Cum sounding throw the towne."

Because of a private colloquy with Cynthia a huge mandoline was thrust at Robert and he was told to give them a song of Andalusia. He protested that he could not, then, the plea reiterated, that his songs of Spain and Italy were but for singing on the floor of peasants' cots. So be it. A cushion was put at his feet and on that he succumbed and strummed. To atone Heath drew him aside later and placed on his knee his collection of woodcuts of the Delziels, Linton, Sandys, Fred Walker, Arthur Hughes, Millais. Mrs. Heath was in conference with Cynthia over a sheaf of music at a corner table.

Harrison Jardine came over and sat beside Robert.

" Lovely home," he murmured. " I adore these old places in the heart of the old city." He nodded to the big convex mirror. " No artist's home, no home of culture, should be without one, so to speak. They have several here. One in the hall, one in this room, one in the dining-room. Delightful to sit here and see the room in miniature and the people like puppets. We are, in a way, puppets. It makes it all like a picture and so long as we don't get too close it doesn't distort. And they gathered colour ! "

He raised a hand and laid the finger-tips on Robert's shoulder, as with a prerogative of more venerable years and in evidence of having taken to him.

"I wonder," he said, "I wonder, talking of colour, if you ever came across the writings of a man called Hearn, Lafcadio Hearn. I recall very well some papers of his I read in *Harper's* a few years ago. It would be criminal if they were never collected in book form. I must look that up some day. All the colour of the Caribbean! Hearn is the name. H.E.A.R.N. Try to look him up. Lafcadio Hearn."

He rose, and with the fingers of one hand negligently in the pocket of his dinner jacket (it was not a full-dress affair) he found his monocle with the other, scooped it into his eye-socket and sat down beside another guest, on the arm of his chair.

Robert liked him. Jardine, some thought, overdid the show of heart but he was sincerely a well-wisher, always speedy among the young if they showed merit to tell them they were "one of us." He liked to be with "the boys." He was a sort of self-created doyen of the arts, yet not acknowledged. Some might laugh at what seemed absurd assumption in his crowning compliment: "You are one of us," but he did not mean it just as it sounded, perhaps, in some ears. As an art critic not only was he encyclopædic in knowledge but deft in valuation. He had a book to his name that artists the world over treasured and that would probably be treasured by other artists after he, and these admirers, had gone.

Robert passed over to a wall. An etching above a spindle-legged table had caught his eye. Palms on table he bent to it. *The Wave*. That was the name of it, written in a neat script in the margin. And that was all it was, just a wave breaking. It was Japanese in sufficiency. He peered at the name of the artist who had watched waves and made that record. The signature was much smaller than the title.

" Robert Gartmore," he read.

Now there was a snob at the party and that was her moment. As Jardine rose from the arm of the chair on which he had been sitting and sauntered toward the piano, she stopped him.

" Do tell me," she whispered, " who is the painter that Mary Chadwick married ? "

" Haven't you seen any of his work ? " he asked.

" Oh, I mean his people."

" Ah ! For example," and Jardine waved a hand in air, " he has just discovered an etching by his grandfather, I see. I was going to draw his attention to it. His grandfather was Robert Gartmore."

" I never heard of him. Was he nice ? "

" Well, he wasn't nasty," replied Jardine. " He was a sort of ascetic Simeon Solomon."

The lady frowned, puzzled.

" Drank water out of a wooden bowl, so to speak," Jardine continued. " Commercial turn utterly lacking. A few know his work but there is too little of it, too little. A very remarkable man. He left it all at the height of his fame, when his wife died." Jardine sighed. " Retired to outlandish places. I have an example of his work."

He temporarily forgot the rotund lady who desired Robert's pedigree. He himself was of pedigreed stock, but he chose his friends for themselves, not for the rank of their progenitors. He had thus made many friends who would provide pedigree references for their descendants. The lady bored him. He stifled a yawn. He thought to finish her off.

" You do not mean to tell me," he said, and inserting his eye-glass viewed her, " that you have never heard of the Barclays of Barclay ! "

" Oh ! " she said, impressed. Raising her head (which was, Jardine thought, rather like a parrot's) she examined Robert while he examined the etching.

Not that Jardine had ever heard of the Barclays of

Barclay. He had but invented them at the moment for her solace, in response to her need.

"Still," he privately reflected, dropping his eye-glass, "truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, and they may exist." And, "Barclay of Barclay," he murmured to himself.

As the impressive and impressed lady studied Robert he turned, looking round the room for his wife, tried to catch her eye.

"Cynthia," he called quietly.

She looked up and he beckoned.

There was a lifting of eyelids here and there, a puzzlement for some. She was Mary to all of those there to whom she was not, newly introduced, Mrs. Barclay. She had always been Mary to them. Yet it seemed she answered to Cynthia. It was odd; but, somehow, calling her Cynthia seemed to set him apart from the rest of them.

"I say," said Sydney Heath to Robert, "funny question I am going to ask you. Why do you call our Mary, or your Mary, Cynthia?"

"Because that's my name," explained Cynthia, answering for him. "Mary Cynthia Chadwick—Barclay," and she bowed.

"Well, all these years and I never knew what the C stood for," said Heath.

"Quite a satisfactory answer," said Mrs. Heath. "Entirely satisfactory. He calls her Cynthia because that is her name. That's a lovely thing you are looking at."

Robert nodded.

"It's by his grandfather," Cynthia told them.

"What! Was your grandfather Robert Gartmore?" asked Heath.

A little knot formed round the thing of beauty to admire it, or to fail to admire as the case might be. For, to adapt a phrase of Fra Raeburn's, there could only be brought out of them appreciation of what they had the power to appreciate.

But the evening was far spent. It was time to go. And when the Barclays were leaving they found Harrison Jardine accompanying them down the stairs, on the sill of the landing windows lamps alight then.

“Delightful evening,” he said as they crossed the court. “Take care of that plank, Mrs. Barclay. Delightful evening! Not without its merriment. I must retail part of it to you. Let me call a cab. Let me lift you good young people home.”

With a summons of his waved walking-stick he brought a late cruising four-wheeled cab to the kerb. He sat facing them in it, and he told them of the lady whose anxiety was for genealogy, and how he had gratified her. His face was very grave, with just a little occasional *twist* to the mouth. The lights from the street lamps went running over his cheeks, and passing and running again as the cab trundled along. He sat with coat collar turned up, a long white scarf round his neck, hanging down, his gloved fingers locked atop his gold-headed cane.

“When my wife is home again—she’s away just now—I want you two dear people,” he said, “to come to dinner some night. Just ourselves. I’ve an example of your grandfather’s work to show you, a little water-colour, a bit of moorland and a sunset—one of these I recall well seeing every evening going up in the Hebrides trip to Stornaway once. To tackle a thing like that tries a man’s weight. Ah, he was a great artist. One of us! One of us!”

Robert, looking at that face as the light of the street lamps ran intermittently over it, saw, as the chief characteristic, not bumptiousness, not presumption, but kindness. The face stayed with him. When he closed his eyes to sleep it was there, the lights chasing the shadows across it, the monocle of defence as much as of affectation put away, Jardine having been entirely at ease in the cab.

We never know, meeting people for the first time, what part they are to play in our lives.

CHAPTER XXIX

IT was in this period, usually spoken of as his Middle Period (thus referred to in Harrison Jardine's monograph on his work) that things began to go wrong. Because of his tolerance Robert did not know for certain that they were going until they had gone.

He had little in common with Cynthia's family. It was saturated with the snobbery that is generally associated with the *nouveau riche* but does not seem to be theirs alone. When their son Norman came down from Oxford, Oxford should have ceased to be. They talked about Norman at Oxford as though no one in their family had ever been to as much as kindergarten classes.

Robert splendidly felt—listening to them, observing them—that it had been granted to him to cull Cynthia away from a dead society to a living one, a sort of paladin for her spirit. She had many friends, such as the Heaths, who were not friends of her people, indicative of her difference. She was, indeed, the only one of the family who had any inclination for other things than the material. Success to her mother meant money, and it meant nothing else. In Robert's set a poor poet, living in a cottage in the country for which he paid a rental of two-shillings-and-sixpence a week, met on easy terms a novelist who had a villa at Cannes, a flat in Piccadilly, and a cottage in Devon that was not a two-and-six a week one, and was not a cottage except relatively speaking.

To hear of such mixings of human beings made Mrs. Chadwick's face lengthen. Society to her was a thing of strata. She could not understand it otherwise. She heard with pleasure that her son-in-law was doing a

portrait of a knight, Sir Henry Vat, living in his house to do it, Cynthia a guest while he painted. And she was as naïvely inflated over that as the mother-in-law of a truss-maker might be that her daughter's husband had been summoned to take abdominal measurements in a bishop's palace. Deans and bishops were to her infinitely superior to their Master, that wandering thaumaturgist of Galilee. She heard with stupefaction that Robert had given a bed in his home to a young struggling book-illustrator whom he had found sleeping on the embankment. Cynthia had mentioned it as evidence of his big-heartedness ; but the mother received it as all very well for an ideal but not for practice. She thought that Robert, if he must have such acquaintances, should have given him a shilling or two so that he could go to a model lodging-house instead. Mrs. Chadwick was not the sort of lady he could revere, and she was too old to change.

Mr. Chadwick respected "position," Robert respected character. Incompatability of temperament there ! Soon there came a little rift within the lute, little but momentous. Robert one day showed disdain instead of impassively listening to a typical oration of his father-in-law's.

" Do you know *who* he is ? " inquired Mr. Chadwick of some one who was mentioned.

" I know *what* he is," replied Robert who was weary of all this snobbery, these mental genuflexions towards those spoken of as " important personages " by Cynthia's father.

Mr. Chadwick knew also and gloomily fell silent. That exchange of two sentences, however, was dynamic in effect. A tremendous trifle ! The cat was out of the bag. Robert's contempt for Mr. Chadwick's views and outlook was revealed.

Mountainous grew the evidence to Robert that these people would see nothing in John Reid with whom he had gone swimming in Brennan Bay, and wrestled on

its sands. They might repeat, chortling, some mispronunciation he made in speech—but that's all they would know of him, a mispronunciation. They would see nothing in Mary of the Glen save that she was "the foolish scullion." Ian would be to them but a clodhopper to patronise. Mr. Chadwick decided that Robert was heretically inclined, with taints of nonconformity. Great success—and more than that of art, the success of the emoluments—would be necessary to mollify both Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick toward him.

Cynthia's younger sister was the pride of the family. She was considered to be beautiful, and was pampered by the father. To Robert she became increasingly revolting. There was nothing in her but the self-assurance and vanity that had been inculcated. She gave to him the effect of a bedizened, youthful corpse. He wondered how many hours she spent before the mirror. He saw her eventually but as a petulant pout.

Norman, the brother, wanted to go on the stage, was a devotee of musical comedy, and made a daily peregrination through Burlington Arcade and down Regent Street. The sole evidence he gave of any need of art—or pictures, let us say, for art is hardly the word—was to be observed in his bedroom which was plastered with photographs, supposed to be a trifle naughty, of ladies lifting their skirts above the insteps, or arrayed in tights and trunk-hose, and with such smiles upon their faces that not only did their teeth but their gums show. On visits to the studio he attempted to talk art, informing Robert that he did not care much for Dutch masters. He had never seen any Dutch paintings he liked, he said.

"Too bad," replied Robert.

French painters, explained Norman, had a tendency to be indecent—but one knew what the French were, he appended.

"Yes, quite," said Robert, and recalled the haystacks of Monet.

It may be, of course, that what Jean Scott said had some truth in it: it may be that he loved Cynthia *blindly*, that is, blind to all but surface. Yet there were indications that she was different, an exception in her family. She had friends, as we know, that they did not share. People she must have round her, but those she desired were not such as she met at home.

Married, she was soon upon what would have been styled formal terms with her relatives, her visits to them but as duty calls. It remained for time to give evidence if Robert's friends would be hers, whom she would gather round her, who would gravitate to her. For her there must be the stir, the excitation of throngs, piquancy of intercourse. For him people were moving otherwise. Intercourse with his kind made him happy, but there was in him still the child who had looked out of the window on the others at play. Or if that does not rightly express this facet of him, it may be said that intercourse with his kind made him happy, but there was in him the influence of a childhood in which he had learnt to play quietly and alone, looking out of the window at the others at play. The longing to join them had been mastered, and then the capacity to do so had been dulled from inanition. Later, as a young man, poverty, preventing converse, had carried on that effect, that influence of his childhood. When he did join with his fellows the occasion was thus additionally tremendous to him. The early preventions, restraints, made fellowship more precious. At the same time he had learnt, long since, mastering his longings and sociability, to play happily alone. So, from sharpened ecstasy of consociation he would return to solitude which, accepting, he had grown accustomed to, even learnt to love, precious solitude, a solitude of a sort in no way that of a misanthrope. A sense of inevitable, impending partings, also from early years, lurked in him.

To begin with he introduced Cynthia to persons who

stimulated her, whom he had come to know chiefly through Wilton and Fairly. Speedily she adapted herself. She needed no more than a hint, by observation, to discover that a home address did not matter one way or another. She came to realise that a family tree was less important than what it bore. She was not, if fickle, so flagrantly, flauntingly selfish as her sister Grace. She was a winning hostess. She had beauty. She had charm.

This Middle Period (or its beginning) was one of work, of excitement and happiness. That wrought-iron lamp over the tall blue door beyond the three shallow steps came to be familiar to many. There was an old-fashioned scraper by the side of that door, a hole in the wall reminiscent of a Spanish stirrup or, in shape, horseshoe, with the scraper set across the bottom. Many journeying feet were scraped thereon, broad toecaps and dainty toecaps thrust into that slot for a vigorous or perfunctory withdrawal of pavement grit.

The studio became the sort of place that Mrs. Scott possibly had in mind when she spoke of Cynthia as just the wife for an artist "entering upon his social period." Thursday nights at the Barclays' are in the memories of many still alive. Wilton was a frequent visitor, and Fairly, who brought with them once Peter Pennington, a forlorn-looking little man who was a humorous writer, or rather a writer of humorous stories, and used to talk dismally on the theme of what the world was coming to, but always, sometime in the evening, would remember he was a humorist and crack a joke. On the mantelpiece was a ship modelled by a blue-water sailor with but a jack-knife. It would start Robert off, sometimes, when it was remarked upon, on accounts of cascades of rain off Cape Horn, hurrying veils and lances against dun promontories, or on the listlessness of the doldrums when the tar bubbled between the deck-planks. He would tell of his arrival in the Firth of Clyde, looking for the hills of purple with silver streams. He made it

symbolic in the telling. People with their troubles and forebodings felt that the purple hills and silver streams were truth, the fog not so. The fogs pass.

Happy days these, of work. Happy those Thursday evenings at the Barclays'. But, with the passage of time, Robert discovered that though he was living in no little box of a room on fifty pounds a year conditions were oddly similar. He had to worry over twenty pounds in place of twenty shillings. And, for the shekels, he painted portraits he would not otherwise have done. The grand passion of his life suffered change to a trade. Nothing ignoble about trade, but he felt something lost out of his life.

Some of these portraits were caustic comments in paint. There was the man of whom the legend had been created that he was geniality incarnate. Robert let him talk, and listened.

“Sympathy, sympathy!” he said at one sitting. “Sympathy with humanity is the great thing”; and he proceeded to give Robert an account of how, sympathising with a man (from whom he wanted some information) over a domestic trouble, he had put him into a mood to supply the desired information. “I’d never have been able to get it out of him if I had simply asked him for it. You see, I paved the way by showing human interest in him and SYMpathy. Ah, sympathy!”

Behold, in the portrait, the allegedly big-hearted and genial one revealed as rather a sly old man. Fra Rae-burn, naming the Hatrick portrait (how long ago that seemed now!) *A Man Without a Soul*, Robert recalled, and had his own private sub-title for many a picture. This one he called *The Confidence Trickster*. There was one of a fashionable prelate that he named *He That Is Greatest Amongst You . . .* And a certain *grande dame* (a poem of Kipling’s at that time had caught on widely) he thought of, privately, as *Judy O’Grady*. One of the critics, in an article on him, commented: “He

is becoming dangerous. He may not only paint his sitters. He may show them up."

CHAPTER XXX

AFTER three years they left that studio-house of the blue door and the lamp. It was Cynthia's idea to move. He had talked over the question of expenses with her. He was saving nothing, he explained, and they should think of the future. He was living in apparent affluence and actually hand to mouth. He constantly received requests for donations to this, that, and the other, people unaware that a rising fame is not necessarily synonymous with a fat banking account. A church even asked him for an organ.

Cynthia pointed out that an address was a great thing. Take photographers, she said ; one in Pimlico might take no better pictures than another in Mayfair, but with a Mayfair address the price was doubled. He found, he had also remarked in that talk, too many people coming to the studio. They interrupted him. So they moved to a house in West Park Street and he rented a studio in Knightsbridge. He was beginning to take a great interest in etching then. When there was no portrait being painted he was busy with his plates and his press.

A tall, narrow house it was in West Park Street, but the address was notable. Cynthia had been right. It increased his fees. But he had to work, work. There were those, of course, who said he ignored his wife for his art. She grew weary soon of the colour-schemes of the new house and they had to be changed. And there were dresses that she grew " just sick and tired of " even before their fashion was out of date.

Her brother, the gay dog, constantly borrowed from Robert. There was always a family shame to be averted over these " borrowings," and for Cynthia's

sake he "loaned." Not only for that reason, perhaps. Norman had a way of saying, "I can come to you, Bob, old man. People say Scotsmen are close, but it's a lie."

That came to an end one day. Norman began to look upon the Knightsbridge studio as a place of call, to rest in. As he was with pictures, so he was with books. He was one of those for whom exist these publishers who specialise upon Unexpurgated Editions. If a book was advertised as unexpurgated, Norman bought it.

"I object to having my reading controlled," he'd say. "It is ridiculous, and unctuous, and a robbing of our personal liberty."

One morning he came in, "dropped in" was his way of describing it—"just dropped in to see you. Awfully sorry I can't pay you back that last fiver. But, I say, you're interested in literature as well as paintin'. See what I picked up to-day—an unexpurgated edition of *Madame Bovary*. I object to the liberty of the subject being—"

"Oh, go to hell!" roared Robert. "There's the door. Shut it on the other side, for God's sake."

Norman slunk away and—

"He's pretty raw to-day," he muttered in the corridor. "Wonder what's the trouble."

It was only bills—and a copper plate that was not pleasing him, and that haunting, growing, carking sense of having, somehow, taken a side-turning despite all the praise of critics. He sometimes looked back on the fifty-pounds-a-year days as the most heavenly of his life. Yet also he now recalled, with pity for her besieged by carking cares (the cares of penury), Mrs. Cameron on the day she went with him to the outfitters to buy a new suit. Again, in memory, he saw her absently fumbling with her purse, fingering her chin. Now he understood the significance of that remembered pose and those pathetic gestures. God bless her, the dear woman, how good she had been to him !

When the little rift came with Cynthia he told himself the fault was entirely his. He should not have said what he did. He'd not meant it as she took it—that he'd swear; but he could see that it was entirely natural for her to take it as she did. She came to the studio one day and, seeing his cheque-book lying on a table picked it up and glanced at it. The last counterfoil showed that he had that day paid five guineas to a hospital.

"What's this, Bob? Five guineas to the Bethesda Hospital?" she asked.

"The secretary wrote to me," he explained. "They need urgently fifty more beds. Do you know that a third generation of Londoners is practically non-existent. They get heart-breaking cases—children."

"But you can't afford it, Bob. You know all these people just keep asking money from everybody who's at all before the public."

"Well," said he, and he spoke like an explanatory child, "I felt I couldn't afford it, and yet I can work and make more money. Smithson tells me my etchings are catching on and he's going to shove the prices up. The way I looked at it was that I'd just paid out five hundred pounds for redecorating the house for you and five guineas seemed such a little in comparison."

"The redecoration of the house is as much for you as for me," she retorted. "We have to keep up appearances. You know what snobs people are."

"Oh, yes, I know. I did not mean you especially. Well, I thought of that anyhow, and of a bill yesterday for hats—I forget what. And I thought that if I could afford that I could surely afford—"

"You don't want me to be shabby, do you? You don't want me to have people tell me that they've liked that hat I'm wearing every time they've seen it?"

"My dear, I want to give you everything—but I only meant that five guineas is so little in comparison. And it is a children's hospital. One of the most

haunting memories of my life is of—of a lot of poor little gamins of the slums, slinking, waiting in a dank close when they should have been tubbed and asleep in comfortable cots."

Her expression changed. She bit her lip. Then she ran to him with an impulsive swirl and threw her arms round him.

" You dear, generous, sentimental old thing ! " she said and kissed him. " I feel sometimes like a mother to you. You are such a boy. And you have such a—oh, lost and puzzled sort of look," and she hugged him again.

Then she glanced at the clock. She must go. She had an appointment with her masseuse.

It seemed at the moment that there was no rift, that the danger of it had been passed. Yet there was. An emotion of admiration for him had momentarily put all well ; but she felt that, even if she had not been censured for expenses, Robert was privately grieved over them. They drifted apart.

Friends came to see him in the studio at Knightsbridge who no longer visited West Park Street. And at West Park Street, subtly but surely, the visiting friends became much more Cynthia's than his. Wilton and Fairly, for example, came to the studio. To West Park Street came Lady Dorothea Norbury, a dabbler in the life of artists or, at least, in the diversions of some artists. She became Cynthia's closest friend.

There was one, Lester Cochrane, who eventually became almost a constant attendant on Cynthia, much more constant than Robert knew. He was an elegant, an exquisite, a connoisseur of music and pictures. Every now and then he floated some magazine of what Robert called the " arty sort." The paper of them, the printing of them, were a delight to the touch and the eye. Cochrane kept these toys of journals going with his own money and, when he tired of them, killed them. They were the repositories for the medley of his taste.

Had he been poor instead of wealthy he would, instead, have kept scrap-books and a commonplace book. *Weel-connekit* he was as they say in Scotland—well-connected, which means that he was the grandson of So-and-So, the nephew of So-and-So, and related to So-and-So, who had perhaps shown brilliant political, scientific, or literary gifts, or bore titles—or were rich. Money, which had been a grievous nuisance to Robert, Lester Cochrane had aplenty.

Robert did not dislike him. In fact he liked him better than did some others not of Cochrane's set. He was a great talker, and some other great talkers disliked him merely because he got the floor when they wanted it. Robert found his conversation sparkling, witty, and with occasional hints of deeps as well as surface glitter. A handsome fellow he was, and always impeccably clad. A sensitive fellow he was (his face alone announced that to Robert), alert to shades of beauty and to wit. Not that Robert cared for too frequent doses of him. He was like green chartreuse which one can't drink by the tankard. "The best of the lot" Robert labelled him in his mind. Yet there was something about Lester Cochrane that cast a cloud across his sensibility to his charm. Instability—that, he thought, was the quality in Cochrane which limited his appreciation of him, withheld a full liking.

Now Robert had always held it as a creed that in true love there should be no accompaniment of jealousy. Others, to be sure, would say (that subject under discussion) that lack of capacity for jealousy was evidence of heedlessness, of lack of love. He did not argue the point. He was no debater, given more to meditation than dispute.

But there came a night on which he had to admit to himself that he suffered the pangs of jealousy. Being what he was he had therefore, at least as an aside, to tell himself that, according to his canon, his love must be of the wrong sort. Cynthia was out on his return to

West Park Street from the studio, and later arrived, bringing Lester Cochrane with her for dinner. There was something in the manner of these two—he could not put a name on it—that troubled him. He found himself wanting to know where they had met, and when, how long they had been together. When Cynthia mentioned casually that they had "bumped into each other" he was suspicious that the encounter had been pre-arranged. But though anxious for details he laughed her remark aside, lest any suggestion of desiring to hear more of the allegedly chance encounter should expose his jealousy. Then, having himself closed the subject, he was in a torment with the thought that his off-hand manner might be construed as lack of interest in her.

A side-long grave look from Cochrane he read, self-accusing, as due to that interpretation in Cochrane's mind. He wanted to cry out that he was not neglecting his wife. That's what they would say—neglecting his wife for his art. He wanted to explain in response to that look that he had to work and work to make money, and that Cynthia and he had different tastes in acquaintances and friends, and that when he was tired hers did not refresh him. When his mind seemed absent over dinner, he was considering that, while he painted, she must have social intercourse; and he suddenly swung to the other extreme and was glad that these two could be such good friends as, clearly, they were.

He was more than wontedly friendly to Cochrane, that view achieved, would not let him go after dinner, kept him at the piano. Cochrane was an amazing improvisator. He could not play from music—or would not. But in certain moods he would sit down to the piano and, for a few minutes, match the great composers—in snatches. The sustained flight was not his. Musicians marvelled that he stopped where he did, being able to go so far. A dilettante. And when in the

mood he would imitate this or the other player, sitting at the piano in the poses of the original, and those watching restrained the laughter that arose over the mimicry because of the perfection of the performance.

Robert routed the green mood successfully and lo, when their guest was going, it surged back and took possession again. He had turned to walk to the door with him and in a mirror was stabbed by the sight of a glance Cochrane cast toward Cynthia. He saw him off. He dallied in the hall, considering that glance, straightened a picture here, another there, that were hardly noticeably askew. He was a fool, a fool. Could not people like each other? Did he want Cynthia to hate every male except himself? Did he imagine he owned her? He went back to join her.

"Isn't he a brilliant fellow?" he remarked. "I'm glad you brought him along with you. He's a fine chap!"

That last was perhaps excessive. It seemed to him that her brows twitched slightly at the pronouncement. She rearranged a cushion. She moved over to the hearthrug.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," Robert suddenly broke out.

Impulsively he took her in his arms and holding her so, she with her head back to meet his gaze (almost defiant her pose seemed somehow), he had a sense of ordained, inescapable loneliness. He kissed her very tenderly on the cheek, not passionately on her lovely mouth, a tender kiss on the cheek.

Cynthia was baffled by its significance. She felt tenderness in it, something beautiful, something sad.

"I'm not good enough for you, Bob," she said.

"My God, don't say that!" he exclaimed, releasing her.

That was but an incident, though a tremendous incident. And still, though there was a new tenderness on her side, gentleness that seemed to be touched with

unexplained pity on his, while he worked and seemed to find joy in work she required the excitement of vivacious, or even frivolous, converse—and they drifted apart. Dipping into her coterie he found it but slightly amusing, and increasingly false and forced.

Some light remark of one of its members was taken up by the others and considered seriously. They were going to Algiers, "on the desert's edge," as they said, "in the sunshine, among French bugles, and Moors, and camels," to set up a writing colony.

Robert seemed to Cynthia unreasonable and cynical about it all when she gave him the invitation.

"Imagine it, darling," he said, "each reading the other his verses in the evening. They are playing at it too."

"Well, you have friends who look at your pictures and criticise."

"True," he agreed. "Oh, it may be all right. But I think—I think—oh, I think they'd be better talking to fishermen than to each other. Anyhow, I can't go. I've to make money."

That remark annoyed her. She was not sure it was not an oblique thrust at her costliness. He did not mean it so any more than in that other emotional scene in the studio, comparing the amount of bills for house decoration, and hats, with that of a donation to a children's hospital, he had been censuring her. That had apparently been condoned of her and forgotten, but it was only on the edge of Limbo. It recurred to mind and it rankled, at least slightly. Discussion of financial outlays between them were not easy to conduct. Perhaps something in the nature of what is called "guilty conscience" affected her, and a family selfishness from which she was not immune caused her, spirited as she was, to take umbrage at any suggestion of censuring. It was all to her credit that she did not respond to that remark on this occasion as though it were a rebuke. She had seen her young

sister utterly spoilt at home. She was not sure now but that Robert helped to spoil her. What a complicated creature she felt herself to be sometimes! If only poor dear Robert was as rich as Lester Cochrane. A hard little glint showed in her blue eyes.

"You've no portrait commissions at the moment," she said. "Why not go on with them—with us—and be sociable? You could do some etchings there. It would be a new scene."

"I don't like them," he confessed. "They ring false to me."

"I suppose you would rather have your old shepherd you are always talking about now," said she.

He looked at her for a long time after that. He said nothing. He was not thinking of Ian. She did not send his thoughts to Rathay. He had a vision of a den, a mere pub, with a consoling radiance in a murky night in Glasgow, and a delicate beauty, a frail creature. He heard her husky voice—"I ken most folks want to be doing something else than putting tops on marmalade jars, on and on . . ." She had understood.

At his strange silence Cynthia turned away, to accept the invitation by phone, with regret that her husband, however, could not accompany her. The scene was over. The incident was closed. She went to Algiers alone.

The day she left town a letter arrived for him from Mary of the Glen. Others he had received, occasionally, more frequently (or less infrequently) when he was in Glasgow than since coming south. The handwriting of this one, it seemed to him, was more gnarled than of the others.

"DEAR RAB,—I was very pleased to get your letter a while back which found us still at the same old place with no changes but since then there has been changes

you will be sorry to here for we have had the 'influence' epidemic very severe and i am sorry to tell you that Miss MacCulloch got a chill on top going out to soon and was buried Saturday was a week, there was some was for taking the coffin out through the window instead of through the door, Mr. Ian said havers and she would be carried through the door sensible and not be used that way for a foolish notion about ill luck but in the end he said have it the way you will because it does not matter one way or another and they they said alright and took her through the door, who would have thought she would be the first to go, Mr. Ian says he will write to you and you said in your last letter, that you were to be excused for not writing he must say you have done well but it is his turn, to ask you to be excused, i was sorry to loose miss MacCulloch we got on fine but what finished me was only three days after she was taken away the dog Bruce was backed on to asleep by a cart sudden and had his back broke but that made me greet for miss MacCulloch and the dog, it seems nothing comes singly, i don't know if we are ever going to get any sunshine there is a new kirn now with a handel to turn instead of up and down and it is easier i think, mrs MacCulloch is failing since they took away Miss i have had four hens that lay in orra places instead of in the boxes and have found where three lays i often mind you when i am going to get the eggs one of them lays for it is where i showed you another one when miss was in Glasgow and mr Ian at the fair, mrs MacCullochs, 'reumatisms' is bad Mr Ians, 'cough' that he had left after the 'influence' is much better during the days only in the morning bad now, i hope you are making well with the 'painting' there was a bit in a book about you that mr Ian cut out and John Reid brought up a picture of your wife o but she is prety in the picture no wonder you maried her but i think she is luck to, i think i have told you all the news for the present so will close, Mr Ian said you would be

glad to know miss was dead that is not the way to say it but you know i mean you would be sory,

“ i remain

“ your friend

“ MARY ARGYLL,

i hope you can read this leter, i did not tell you i had the 'reumatisms' for i am that hurt at having them but i must explain my hand of write being bad or worse nor usual, i have it bad in my nes to but my thumb will not hold a pen as good as i want, Mr. Ian does the milking or the man you do not know, another Man sin your visit,

“ Good-night.”

CHAPTER XXXI

THE West Park Street house was intolerable to Robert after Cynthia had gone. The rooms were not only empty. Void, they waited desolate for her presence it seemed. The stirring of a curtain in a passing breeze by an open window startled him (he was, apparently, high-pitched) and by its movement accentuated her absence.

What could she see in that man Cochrane? Their manner, now, in retrospect, again troubled him. No, no; he must not be imaginative on these lines. He must not be jealous. She must have friends to go about with while he worked, and that people should adore her was only natural.

The quality of the wind, the force of it, took him back over twelve years. It might have been the same that then, lightly invading Glasgow streets, stirred him to an impulse of departure. The intervening years fell away, or were bridged. He was back again on that day. He saw again the flagstones of the pavement as he posted to the station to catch the boat train that brought him to a wharf where the Firth waters plopped

among the piles (plopping still), and the steamer by it, gulls poising over it, and sliding sideways from it. There was a pinch at his heart, remembering. His thought became exclamatory instead of meditative. How life slips away! Twelve years ago. And how disappointing it is to feel that one is not going upon the right road, that something is wrong, a desirable sense of rightness (not self-righteousness but just rightness—going in the right way) not accompanying, no longer sustaining, lost. He had a feeling that he'd like to fall upon his knees in prayer for forgiveness of all that he had done amiss, and for guidance.

They had shared much, Cynthia and he. He wished her happiness where she was. He felt utterly alone, fanned by that breeze as it seemed across the years, standing at the window lost in thought. Yes, he was afflicted with a desolating loneliness, he who had of old learnt to be happy alone.

The ghostly flutter of that long white curtain was intolerable. It drew his eye. He thought she was there, and she was not. Stepping to the window to close it he abruptly halted, thinking. Yes, he would go to the studio have a bed prepared in the little anteroom and stay there. He could not sleep here, in this house. It was for him now empty though the servants were there. It was empty because she was gone, not just for the evening but perhaps for months.

That resolve held him all the way to the studio and he had a feeling of relief on entering it. He did not miss Cynthia there so badly. The postman, as he was leaving the house, had handed him a sheaf of letters which he had put into his coat. Now he opened them. Bills! Well, she required new clothes preparatory to going to Algiers. She could not go to Algiers without them. And then (though he had not been complaining of her expenses when making explanation of how five guineas had seemed little in comparison with whatever the sum was for decorations and hats) there came a thought

of which he was ashamed : If he had not her how much easier it would be.

He was grieved that such a thought had come to him. It was as if he wished her dead ! The thought of death in connection with her was intolerable. He did not even wish he hadn't married her. But his work was getting to be too "slick," he believed. It was all rot, he decided, to say that out of necessity an artist did his best. He looked up at the drawing by his grandfather that Sir Ewart Lang had given him and sighed.

How he loved her ; how he loved her—her beauty. The woman who had posed for the *Venus de Melos* (if any posed, if she was not but a sculptor's dream) was not more perfect of line. What was that Oriental proverb or saying ? He tried to recall it. It was something to the effect of : "I cannot live with her, and I cannot live without her." His case was not as torturing perhaps as that, but there was some likeness. He must put an end to these thoughts. He did not like the way they led. He went over to the speaking tube, blew into it, and listened for the caretaker's "Sir ?"

"I would like to have a little chat with you, Bartlett. Could you come up ?"

"Immejately, sir."

Bartlett was willing, hearing what the painter had to put before him.

"Certainly, sir. A pleasure, sir. I'll go to West Park Street if you'll be so good as to give me a letter to the servants there. They'd never know, sir, with the tricks and stratagics of thieves in London, but it might be a compact, so you give me a letter to them and I'll fetch blankets and sheets. That couch is perfect for a bed. I can bring you a bawth that will go underneath it, and fetch you hot water every morning. Every gentleman needs his daily bawth, sir. Some has two. Weakenin' I calls it ; for the likes of me it would be ; but it's all according. A pleasure to bawth you in the evening also, sir. You don't need to go out for your meals, sir. My

wife is a wonderful cook—in the household of a Sir she was, sir, as cook. While your good lady is away this can be a home to you, sir, instead of a workshop, begging your pardon, sir, what I mean to say if you take my meaning. Gentleman before you here, sir, he was not a painting gentleman. He was a writing gent, sir, but he liked a big room. My wife and me did for him. He had his bawth every morning. A little bit dictatitious sometimes he was but no harm meant, and he paid for it. He was a gentleman, sir—wore a silk hat, brought up on good food and jimminastics, and had been to the Mandoline College at Oxford."

"Well, that will be splendid," said Robert.

When all was in order he was reminded, in that anteroom, of his little room out New City Road way in Glasgow. There was a bed in a corner. There was the table with the remains of dinner, for Bartlett had at once acquainted Mrs. Bartlett with the new arrangement. Those old penurious days seemed rosy in retrospect.

Robert sat round from the table to drink his coffee, feeling better. One leg cast over the other he lay back, blowing smoke, and looked at a lovely convoluted shell on a shelf on the wall. He had had that shell since he was seven or eight. It was a part of his past, of his life. At West Park Street was a ship cut from one piece of wood with a knife. A bit of his life was there too. The flying-fish had long since gone to the Limbo of imperfectly preserved flying-fish. It went into the "ash-pit" in Mrs. Cameron's word, "midden" according to Mr. Cameron or, when he tried to get the polite name, "ash-pit midden." But some souvenirs lasted longer than flying-fish; of some it might almost be said that they were eternal. That shell, for example. Robert rose and took it down, held it to his ear and heard the sigh.

"Not a preserved echo of the sea, really," he said to himself, "only the thin echo of the blood in the veins in my head. Not but what the miracle of the blood in

our veins is as wonderful as that fancy would be were it true.

He replaced the shell.

"I don't feel well. Hope I'm not going to be ill, for I've got to keep going," he thought.

He had not had many illnesses in his life. There had been scarlet fever and chicken-pox that Mrs. Cameron nursed him through, and also disfiguring mumps. That was long ago, but his feeling now was reminiscent of that during, or just before, these illnesses.

"I must write to Mrs. Cameron. I've been forgetting those dear souls."

He lay back and relaxed. No, he was not going to be ill, he told himself. He was just tired. This was how he had felt when he went down to Loch Lomond, after five years of ceaseless application, to rest, feeling at the end of endeavours. That was when he met Cynthia. Yes, and it was once again, after just close on five years of unremitting work, that this deep inner pleading for rest came. He had been getting querulous, inwardly if not outwardly. He had had to keep guard on himself to prevent a general growing exasperation from making him snappy. The result of that had been an increasing manner of aloof calm.

Only occasionally did he see Cynthia's people. She had drifted from them. Norman had not gone on the stage, but had become so deeply involved with a certain lady of the chorus that his father decided to see what he could do as an empire-maker, and despatched him overseas with promise of a quarterly remittance to follow. Mr. Chadwick—childish, ridiculously bombastic and snobbish—came into Robert's mind, and he dismissed him. He did not want to hate. Contempt was better than hate, but even contempt he'd be glad to be free of. No longer was he happy just in loving the world and the light on things. For the first time in his life he wanted friends not because of his love for them but because he wanted succour for himself. Tired !

By Jove, what he'd do would be to paint Wilton ! He'd make something of that. He'd love doing it. By JOVE ! He'd have a flower in Wilton's button-hole and get Wilton to paint it. What an idea ! He'd send a note to him right away, telling him of the notion. He stepped to his desk to write the delightful letter at once, and the sight of pen and paper made him weary. Oh, he'd rest to-night and write to Wilton in the morning. It was a great inspiration but it would keep. Or he would walk along and see Wilton about it to-morrow. Better than a letter, that would be. He'd see on his friend's face how the suggestion caught him.

He sat down in a big chair in the studio, refilled his pipe, whistling softly a bar or two of music over and over, unaware what he whistled. Bartlett came up to take away the dinner dishes and looked in at the studio door.

“ Everything all right, sir ? ”

“ Yes, indeed. Tell Mrs. Bartlett she's a great cook. They couldn't have done it better at the Berkeley.”

“ Thank you, sir.”

He heard the smooth click of the lock on Bartlett's departure, stretched out in his chair, hands behind head.

“ By God,” he said, “ I love her. But a painter should not marry till he's made his way. It's not fair to the woman if she's been accustomed to get all she wants.”

Then he frowned. He remembered the Broughtons. They had told him their story. It was a hilarious, happy, adventurous story of a marriage on next to nothing, a house furnished only on the ground floor and with a carpet on the stairs only as far as they were visible from the entrance-hall. They had told him the story in a happy duet one day. Thinking of them somehow was tranquillising. There was a happy couple !

The bell buzzed.

“ I hoped to God it's not Cynthia's flatulent father,” he muttered as he walked to the door.

It was Peter Pennington, that humourist (and incidentally gossip) of the dolorous countenance that Wilton and Fairly had introduced to him. He was sadly considering the door as Robert opened it.

"Hullo, Pennington!" said Robert. "Delighted to see you."

Pennington's sad face was suffused with a smile of pleasure at the greeting. He entered jauntily.

"At a loose end, Barclay," he said. "Looked you up. Saw by the papers that the missus was off to Algiers. Thought you might be feeling lonely."

"That's awfully good of you. Extraordinary thing—I was just looking at my tools and thinking I never wanted to see them again."

"That's only human," said Pennington. "You've been at it too hard. If you knew how I hate my desk. Lord, turning them out, these stories of mine, turning them out! Damned if I know what the public sees in them. Well, I'm glad they see it anyhow, whatever they see." He sat down. He frowned at Robert. He prided himself on being something of a lay-doctor. "I'd take my temprature if I were you. Got a thermometer?"

"Goodness, no!"

"Everybody should have a thermometer. Perhaps it is only change you require. You admit you are tired of the sight of your tools. That's a sign. There's no sense in flogging a dead horse. Why don't you go to Algiers after your missus?"

"I might do that, too."

A flick of light showed in Pennington's eyes at that reply. He looked like a man at cards discovering a hand that he could not be mask-like over.

"My wife wanted me to go with them," said Robert.

"Did she!" ejaculated Pennington.

"Yes, but I felt I could not spare the time."

Pennington went into a daze temporarily. He was thinking how queer people could be, how, for example,

following some dubious course of action, some course of action they knew to be dubious, they could administer sops to themselves, provide evidence of extenuating cause. Yes, people are fascinating, he thought. Yet one cannot really judge, not knowing all. To be censorious was no doubt a mistake. But he was not here, whatever he was here for, to sit with blind gaze meditating on humanity. Just to think (considering the gossip he had heard) that Mrs. Barclay had wanted Barclay to go with him ! Or was Barclay bluffing ? Queer world !

For half an hour they chatted. Then Robert rose.

" I'll phone the caretaker and see if he's got anything to drink," he said. " I haven't a thing here. I've just installed myself—I mean as a temporary home."

" No, no. Never mind."

" Well, some coffee. Mrs. Bartlett makes great coffee."

Pennington jumped up.

" No, I'll be going," he said. " I just looked in to see you. I saw the light from below. I met Jardine to-day and we were talking about you. I was saying to him I wondered why the dickens you didn't take a holiday with your wife. Saw by the papers you were not of the party."

He took up his hat and stick.

" There now, I've driven you away," said Robert.

" Not a bit of it. I just wanted to pop up and see you." Pennington put a hand on his shoulder. " You go to Algiers, old man," said he very seriously, and then skipped off to the door.

Robert walked with him to the corridor's end, watched him pass down the stairs, walked slowly back to his rooms.

" Taking a great interest in me," he thought. " It's very good of him. It's nice to have friends, real friends. We don't often meet, but I feel that about him. Friendly. I suppose I must look rotten."

He felt so tired that he turned out the studio lights and went to bed. His cheeks were burning.

"Awfully hot in here to-night," he commented, and rose and went to the window. The top was half down and he opened the lower half also, raising the blind to admit more air. "Fourteen," he said as he turned back to bed, and then in bed again, "fourteen." The number haunted him.

"Oh, what the devil does *fourteen* mean?" he asked himself later.

He lit a candle that the admirable Bartlett had placed by his bed-side, unable to lie longer in the dark. Its small flame cast enormous shadows of chairs up the wall and over the ceiling. They looked like monsters bending towards him. The studio walls were plain, but in this anteroom there was a flowered paper. He had never cared for it but had not had one to his mind substituted. There were lots of little things he could go without, not essential. That the studio, the great-workshop, did not offend his eye was of more consequence.

On that night of perturbation, as he looked at the walls, the flowers became faces and, as he studied them, not rigid faces. They grimaced. He had lit the candle to be rid of whelming darkness. He put out the light to get rid of them. He turned. He tossed. He was burning hot. Dry heat. He was aware of some trouble but could not put a name on it. He was engaged upon arithmetical problems, mental arithmetic, and yet not arithmetic alone—most extraordinary problems. Words and figures became mixed. He tried to subtract fourteen from the word Algiers. He agonised over that sum. And then the arithmetic master stood behind with the taws in his hand. That bothered him. If only masters would not stand with the taws in hand while one was doing one's best it would be easier. The sum was hard enough anyhow. It wasn't fair. Fourteen from the word Algiers. He could not do it. But he must do it.

Sweat broke on him in the agony of the attempt. That was a mercy, for he fell asleep then.

In the morning the wall-paper faces were all smirking, grimacing and winking at him. The door opened and a gigantic caretaker entered holding his bunch of pass-keys.

"Oh, sir!" he exclaimed, and was about to back away, then drew near. "Ain't you feeling well, sir?" he asked.

"For God's sake tell me, John," said Robert, and Bartlett stared. His name was not John. "You've been to school. What is fourteen from—I forget. Mary is milking, I suppose?"

"Mary, sir?"

"I painted that with my thumb. Do you think he likes it? I was a funny kid, I think. Oh, that you, Bartlett? It was a picture I did I was talking about, Bartlett."

"Pardon me, sir. Let me feel your head."

Herbert Bartlett laid a rough hand on Robert's brow and drew it back as though it were scorched.

"You lie there, sir," he advised, "I shan't be half a mo'."

He slipped from the room and returned to Robert, who had no count of time, later—a moment or an hour—with his wife. As she entered she swole enormously. A very large woman at any time she was like a balloon then. The closer she came the more she was inflated. Her head grew large as a pumpkin.

"Take her away. Take that away," moaned Robert.

She was of the opinion that the gentleman was ill though a little dry in her accents discussing him with her husband, being aggrieved at him calling her *that*, even though he was in a fever.

The next Robert knew there was a man beside his bed, or a long distance from his bed yet able to touch him—an extraordinary state of affairs. The stranger put a thermometer in his mouth and Robert humoured

him by allowing it to remain there for the requisite length of time ; then he suddenly lost interest and in that lack of interest the doctor faded away from him. Later the light returned in an odd way. It was as though he was inside a camera and the shutter was timed for slow exposure. It opened very slowly and in the circle was a woman wearing a nurse's uniform. It was an interesting picture. Segregated from the rest of the room, in the curve of the opening shutter, it took his fancy and he wanted to make a drawing of it. Slowly the shutter closed.

After that there were occasional returns to consciousness of where he was. A woman was always in the room. Sometimes she had black hair and sometimes red, but he did not worry about that. Life was queer. He wanted to rest.

"People can be very kind," he said once, aware of an attention to some need being paid to him, hazily, distantly. "I am very grateful for friends."

One day he opened his eyes and felt cool and comfortable. No one seemed to be in the room but immediately a figure appeared—the red-haired girl.

"Ah, that's better," she said, and smiled at him.

He turned his head on the pillow. The window was wide open. He could see across the street and he read the number fourteen over a doorway on the opposite side—too obvious an explanation of the fourteen of his troubled accounting to seem, in our day of profound or distorted explanations for such things, one worth considering. Yet it satisfied him, vaguely remembering these calculations.

It was *La Grippe*—only *La Grippe* the doctor said ; but the "only" was chiefly for the comfort of patients. The fever abated, exhaustion had to be prevented. They had to watch for pleurisy, pneumonia. And this *La Grippe* was precisely the same malady as that "influence" of Mary's letter that had told of Agnes MacCulloch's passing.

CHAPTER XXXII

THERE was no longer need for a night nurse. The red-haired girl reigned alone. The invalid had become the convalescent and he was sitting up, sitting in the studio, seeing it all newly. It was as if something pleasant had happened to it. The miniature of it in a convex mirror he had at one end made him think he'd like to make a painting of it—*My Studio*. The freshness of the room to his vision made him think of a hillside shining after rain.

He was half in love with Miss MacKay, the red-haired girl. He had said to her things impossible save for one so weak and ill as to be unsexed. She sometimes remembered some of these remarks and smiled. She was a jolly girl. She could even be broad on occasion, with an accompanying tossing back of her head, a brief infectious laugh. Her merry eyes, the copper glints in her hair, her rich soft voice, and the oddest blend in her manner of strength and quiet, charmed him. She reminded him of Jean Scott, though not facially like her. What was within was perhaps in some ways akin. She was accustomed to convalescent patients being half in love with her. It helped them along. It did no harm. John Llyl, of *Euphues* memory, has left on record one salutary prescription for those fevered by a hectic passion, which is that the sufferer should dissipate his fever by having more than one object for it.

“Where did you learn Gaelic?” she asked him one day, his second out of bed, as they sat in the studio very much at ease.

“Gaelic! Why?”

“There was quite a lot of it one day. You were very busy with sheep it seemed.”

“Was I? That was the Isle of Rathay.”

“Rathay! I come from Rona.”

Rona was the ragged-topped, dun blue wall against the sunsets seen from Rathay.

She had a bed in the Bartletts' quarters so was never far away. Her main duty seemed to be to keep visitors from staying too long if they were unduly exciting. Sometimes she would fain have had them stay for her own pleasure when, for her case, she had to hint that it was time he rested. Wilton, of the blunt manner, the grim jaw, the sudden looks of gentleness, she liked tremendously.

It was on Robert's third day up that there came a letter from Cynthia. Her writing on the envelope, the large, flaunting violet scrawl, set his heart pumping rapidly. But the contents of the letter depressed him. There was some applicability to his case in that Oriental saying he had tried to recall, thinking of her and her perturbing fascination for him.

"... Ralph Lowell has come here from Rome to write a book about a group of flaneurs and perverts he met there. It is the wittiest thing. Dorothea suggests inviting them all to come to Algiers to see if we can guess who's who. You'd adore it with your love of character. I think Lowell is ahead of his time a bit. The masses are not educated up to him yet. The book is in the Remy de Gourmont and Anatole France style—you know. All sorts of delicious shocking obscenities sandwiched in between bits of philosophy—and the most stunning prose."

The most stunning prose. That's what that fellow Lester Cochrane was always saying—the most stunning prose. Robert remembered hearing him say it about the writing of several people one night in the West Park Street house. That was long ago. These last years seemed an eternity. Something had gone wrong. Cynthia did not mention Cochrane but there were phrases of his all through the letter.

A queer group she had got round her. They were all no doubt more or less clever, but all, or almost all, more or less unbalanced, poseurs at best, vicious he fancied at worst. Pennington had told him that one of them lived on the bounty of a patroness who thought he had God-given genius, a musician he, who, said rumour, was a drug addict. He looked upon this circle's hub, wherever it happened to be, as his resting place when he was not engaged. Strange engagements, his. He would have nothing to do with concert platforms. He would only play in drawing-rooms. One society lady would have him at her piano and dangling at her heels for a season, and then he'd be off to another in Paris, in Rome. There were stories about him, and them, though of course these may only have been idle gossip, or idle scandal. But there were those for whom these dubious rumours gave a sinister reptilian splendour to that drawing-room genius. Lester Cochrane was undoubtedly, thought Robert, the best of the bunch.

On the day Robert got up he had written to his wife casually mentioning his illness lest she saw a note of it in the papers (Miss MacKay had told him there had been a caller from one of the dailies asking if it was true that he was ill), saying he felt "a little groggy, but he was getting on."

"I got you some illustrated weeklies," said the nurse after he had read his letters, and she pointed to the table by him where they lay.

He picked up *The Rambler* and turned the pages. Changing guard at Buckingham Palace. Somebody leaving 10 Downing Street. A new four-legged lodger at the Zoological Gardens. People at race meetings in France and on golf courses in Scotland. From sunny Africa. *Beauty and the Beast*. Lady Dorothea Norbury was the beauty and the beast was a camel she stood beside.

There she was! There was Cynthia in a group. *Reading from left to right, Mr. Lowell, author of . . .*

Miss Charlotte Austin, Mr. Hubert Player, Mr. Lester Cochrane, Mrs. Robert Barclay, wife of the famous portrait painter. They seemed to be very happy. All were smiling, except the Charlotte girl. That was how he felt towards them—*the Charlotte girl*.

“The Lowell bloke needs a hair-cut,” he considered. “Well, that’s that. Remy Anatole Lowell. I hope they enjoy the French bugles, and Moors, and what was it?”

He yawned and Miss MacKay, who had been in the anteroom, came in with what she called his tipple, the tonic that was to give him appetite for food that was to give him strength again. He seemed, she thought, suddenly very tired, and he had been looking much better earlier that morning. She suggested a nap and obediently he retired. Once she came into the anteroom and looked at him. He was lying with eyes wide open, and there was that look in them that made her feel she was half in love with him. But then she liked men, or most men.

“You’re not asleep,” she said.

“I’m all right, thank you. I’m resting. I’m happy. I’m thinking about Rathay.”

“That’s the man!” and she went away.

It was nice to have that girl there, to know she was in the next room, the studio. He had a longing for people round him, people who talked his talk, people who were—how to put it?—going where he was going, or in the same direction. No need for them to discuss their journey, their quest. The sense of kinship sufficed. To hear from Cynthia had been good, yet what she had to say made him feel alone.

In the studio Nellie MacKay picked up *The Rambler* and looked through it.

“Funny she does not come back,” she thought while glancing at these portrait groups from Algiers. “She must have heard he’s ill. Oh, of course, he said the other day he had not written to her while he was ill, nor got anybody to write to her. Still, mark my

words, Nellie MacKay, there is something funny here."

She looked at the photograph of Lester Cochrane, trying to make up her mind about him. A pretty sort of man. She had heard about him. He was, she suspected, a sort of male Lady Dorothea Norbury.

Then she heard an odd sound from her patient, listened, quietly stole into the anteroom. He was lying on his back and at the moment of her entrance he feigned sleep. His eyes closed. Nellie was no fool. She stepped closer. Yes, he was feigning sleep ; and there were tears on his cheek.

She left him to the belief that she had not seen. Tears in men's eyes she had encountered before. Weakness after illness can be very trying, she knew. But that man in there, though weak still, was pulling round. He had told her an hour before that he was happy, thinking about Rathay. In Rathay he had been sometimes in his fever though mostly, it seemed, in school ; and once he had looked at her with eyes of delirium and said : "She didn't cry me the prince but she said 'God bless ye, laddie.'" Inexplicable fragment !

While she was frowning over thoughts of him and his connubial life, regarding which she was curious, he yawned and made a sound as of wakening, said : "Ho-hi-hum," and then :

"Miss MacKay, I'll get up now if you think I've slept enough. I don't want to lie here any longer."

Slept enough, indeed ! The humbug. Well, a brave humbug, whatever was his heartache.

Pennington had called two or three times and by his manner had been adversely critical of the standing of Miss MacKay. He might have been an important visiting doctor and the studio a hospital when he condescended to observe her between the coldly civil inquiries on entrance and the frigid bow on departure. When Robert drew her into the talk he listened with

lids lowered, bowed to air when she ceased, and then addressed himself to Robert again. The inference in his manner was that he thought there should certainly be a more rigid professionalism on her side and on Robert's less friendliness. But it may have been chiefly caused by the fact that she was in the way for the retailing of scandalous revelations. She found occasion, though Robert would have detained her, to absent herself in the anteroom ; and Pennington then, head raised, would listen as though for the best—the outer door being closed. Not hearing that he would draw his chair closer and bend forward with an air of secrecy, but divulge nothing. Despite these motions he had neither communicated some information of moral turpitude nor relieved his mind of a jocular story unfit for citation in the presence of a lady, even if she were a nurse. On his third visit he weakened at the outer door to which she accompanied him, holding it open very erect, with, in fact, an erectness a trifle overdone, so that she was reminiscent of Vesta Tilley impersonating a hussar. A roll of her gay eyes atop of these parade manners made his suddenly sparkle.

" I am sure our friend is in the ablest of hands," he said, and pattered away.

That Harrison Jardine had not come to see him perturbed Robert. Perhaps he was ill, or out of town, or did not know of his illness. Jardine, wontedly, hardly let a week go by without looking in at the studio.

" Oh, by the way, Bartlett has just told me," said Miss MacKay, " that a man with a glass eye has several times asked after you without coming up."

" A glass eye ? I wonder who that was." He could recall no acquaintance with a glass eye.

The bell rang. Jardine was ushered in after quiet speech at the door, and Robert knew.

" My boy, I've called once or twice at the caretaker's below to know how you are. Glad you're able to see friends again." Miss MacKay pushed forward a chair

and he turned to her. " You are the one who is pulling him through. You must tell me if I stay too long. No excitement allowed, I suppose ? "

" I think visits from friends are what he needs now."

" Excellent ! "

" The doctor thinks he will be fit to travel soon and wants him, when he is, to get off to the Mediterranean," said the nurse.

" Why not Devon ? " asked Jardine. " We're going to Devon and would love to have you. You ask your vet if Devon won't do."

" Pennington was up the other day and suggested Algiers," said Robert.

Jardine's head went back till he looked as if he awaited a shave in his chair, gazing at the ceiling.

" It's rather a long trip," he said, " a long trip after influenza and a touch of pneumonia, or whatever it was. A fellow is tired after that."

" Cynthia wanted me to go with her. If I had I would have dodged this illness altogether," Robert remarked. " I don't know that I am enamoured of all the bevy there but I would like to see her."

Jardine had recourse to his eyeglass. He looked at the drawing by Robert's grandfather, searching for something to say.

" Always love that thing," he announced.

The nurse in answer to the bell's summons then (muffled summons, for she had muted it with a folded sheet of paper on taking up the case) went to the door. She returned with a pile of letters.

" Do you mind if I look to see who they are from ? " asked Robert.

" Not a bit." Jardine turned to Miss MacKay while Robert looked through the sheaf.

He laid them all aside, save one.

" Here's a letter from Cynthia," he said. " I see the obliteration stamp is *Paris*. She must be on her way home."

"How funny it is," said Miss MacKay, "the way people will look at the outside of letters instead of opening them."

Robert opened the envelope and read. As he did so the nurse saw how his colour changed. Not white he went but ashen. Frowning, she was all nurse then. But something caused her to look at Jardine. She found him watching Robert very grimly.

"*Sal volatile*," she thought.

Robert read the letter a second time without looking at either of them. Then they could see that he was not reading it but staring at the paper, thinking. He was remembering Pennington's reiterated anxiety for him to go to Algiers, and his exclamation of "Did she!" when he mentioned that Cynthia had asked him to accompany her. At the time it had not struck him. Now it returned. And Jardine's advice, that very day, a few moments ago, not to go to Algiers till he felt fit: why, the whole thing was an open secret. He was the only one in the dark. A third time he read the letter, then folded it, put it in the envelope, looked up. Jardine evaded his eyes.

"I say, I say," Robert chanted, valiantly making conversation, "I'm not a good host at all. It's time for tea."

Jardine was on the point of saying he'd be off, thinking Robert had better be alone after receipt of that obviously shocking letter. But on second thoughts—

"Very nice," he said. "Tea would be delightful." And to himself: "Brave fellow. Splendidly carried off. He got a knock just now."

It was Miss MacKay's custom to go downstairs and see to the preparation of tea. She preferred two teaspoonsfuls in the pot to two handfuls. She cut slices of bread an eighth the thickness of Mrs. Bartlett's slices. Mrs. Bartlett was not tasteful with afternoon tea, however admirable as a cook. When she passed

from the room Robert looked at Jardine, who did not then avert his eyes.

"She's left me," said Robert.

Jardine's head nodded up and down slowly.

"Lester Cochrane?" he asked, one might almost write *said*.

"Yes," said Robert.

Jardine shut his eyes, nodded again two or three times.

"Well, you're being brave. It's the only way. Be brave. That's the motto." He was on the point of adding: "It may be all for the best," but thought that at least premature.

Miss MacKay returned, tea-cloth in hand, to a profound silence. Jardine was deep in thought. On-lookers, those who knew all he knew about the relations of Cynthia Barclay and Lester Cochrane, might think it was all for the best and let it go at that; but, after all, Robert must have loved the woman to marry her—whatever sort of love it was. And, by the signs, he still did. For her beauty, likely. He would have his own emotions over it all, whatever the chatterers said one way or another—whether they said they could see it was coming for quite a while, or that he neglected her for his art, or that he would not need to keep his nose to the grindstone now so hard to pay her milliners. A pity, thought Jardine, that this came when he was still so feeble from that accursed epidemic that had hit the town. One of its sequels was depression. Whatever in his heart Robert was experiencing now, or was to experience before the necessary legal proceedings were over and done with, a friend or two within hail would be good.

The entrance of Miss MacKay put an end to that brooding silence in the studio.

"What's all this pile?" inquired Jardine, nodding to a stack of magazines by Robert's chair.

Atop was one open. He lifted it, flicked his monocle into his eyes and skimmed the page.

"Um! An article on Tangier. Colourful. Talking of colour—I wonder if you ever came across the writings of a man called Hearn. Lafcadio Hearn. I remember some articles of his that appeared in *Harper's* some time ago. If he never collected them it would be a crime of omission. Hearn. H. E. A. R. N."

Robert remembered him making practically the same speech years ago, one night at the Heaths'. Then he realised that Jardine was talking for talking's sake, making a theme for conversation. There was in his mind recollection of this man sitting facing him (and Cynthia) in a cab years before, the lights of the street lamps chasing each other across his face. "You good young people," he had called them. Yes, it was all talking for talking's sake. There was fog in the Firth.

Over tea there was seemingly easy converse but, tea finished—

"You won't leave me, Jardine," said Robert, for his friend had been on the point of rising.

"I'd like to stop awhile. I'd love to," said Jardine. "I'm just feeling for my cigarette-holder."

CHAPTER XXXIII

HARRISON JARDINE performed various small but necessary preliminary duties on Robert's behalf during the next days, and two weeks later accompanied him to Paris. Of the crossing he recalls that nothing was said from Victoria station to Calais but this :

He: It's a dull sort of day in the Channel.

Robert: Yes. Yes, indeed, quite a nice day.

Robert was to see Cynthia at her hotel. Thither Jardine accompanied him and left him at the steps with a promise that he would not stray far and would be there to meet him when the interview was over.

"I'll be about. You'll see me," he said.

He nodded, and strolled on, thinking of his friend,

considering : " It's for the best. Good thing they have no children. Time will heal the hurt of it. Well, it will all be over soon. It could all have been done through lawyers, but he would have his own way, though there is no point to be gained in seeing her. Well, well."

A few days before leaving London, Robert had heard from Ian MacCulloch that Mrs. MacCulloch was dead. Nothing there " to wail or knock the breast." She was very old. There was no mock sentiment in Ian's letter :

" . . . it seems strange without Her especially since the Influence took off my sister. We never expected that Agnes would go first. Dying is one of these things that has to be tholed because it cannot be prevented. Not that I would want to hang on inside a body that could not carry me to and fro."

Nothing " morbid " there ; the sentiment of a spartan ; and its effect on Robert was not one of morbidity, though an effect it assuredly had, coming when it did. To go easily, to go easily with others, because of the brevity of it all, the certain end : that was the effect. That's how it influenced him.

On entering the hotel Robert passed his card across the comptoir of the shrine-like office and——

" An appointment with Mrs. Barclay," said he.

The clerk looked at the card.

" Madame expects you." He raised a finger to an attendant and bending over the counter gave instructions.

Extraordinary proceeding ! Going to call on Cynthia! To call by appointment ! It gave the episode the quality of a numb dream. That their tread was soundless on the carpet of the corridor to which he was conducted assisted toward that effect. The attendant knocked at a door.

" They knock in hotels, don't just walk in as in houses," Robert considered to himself as if that trifle

mattered one way of another, or needed comment, or had not been noted by him before.

The quality of dream persisted. His exterior was calm. Cynthia's voice within caused his heart to flutter. That was a preliminary warning to him. He had come with a plan ; emotion in her presence must not upset it. The attendant opened the door and he was announced—announced !

“ Monsieur—Mistair Barclay.”

It was a bizarre interior that he had only a general effect of, no detail noted ; for there stood Cynthia. If thought of the pending interview had been troubling her, if doubt regarding how to greet him, how to begin had made her nervous, embarrassed, Robert put her at once at rest. He took the affair in hand, according to plan. He conducted the proceedings.

“ Well, Cynthia ? ” said he, and smiled.

It was as if he was but an old friend. Her brilliant blue eyes dilated a moment. She admired him tremendously then. She took her cue.

“ Well, Robert ? ” said she, and met his gaze. Then it seemed as if a pain smote her for her eyelids drooped.

“ Sit down,” he said, as though she were the caller and this room his quarters.

Cynthia subsided, folded her hands, watching him. He strolled toward a window and fumbled with the catch of the blind which was drawn down. The spring was new and the shade rushed up the length of the window and stopped with a metallic click. Light was in the bizarre chamber. He paced to and fro twice, then paused before her. Doubt showed on her face. Fear, perhaps. Then he smiled again and she realised it was no smile of cruelty, of a torturer, knowing him.

“ I think it was perhaps a mistake we made—I made, Cynthia.”

The look of doubt, of fear, passed from her face.

“ Oh, Bob ! ” she broke out. “ I'm like a child,

spanked, who has nowhere to cry but in the lap of the spanking mother. Bob—Bob, I do admire you. I've always done *that*."

She stressed the *that* urgently. She would have him know *that*.

"But you prefer him?" he said. He was deeply touched by her simile of the chastised child, but he hoped she did not feel him as a parent who had come to punish.

"It's such a dreadful position," she said. "One thing leads to another. I'm afraid now that he won't trust me. He'll wonder if I'm doing with him what I—did to you—unfaithful, I mean."

It struck Robert that she was making him as it were a confidant of her troubles. Extraordinary position! He was one of this triangle and yet, also, a confidant. He tried to put himself in her place.

"I see what you mean," he said. "I had not thought of *that*."

She stood up with a rustle of silk, trod the room twice, and returning to where he stood watching her, sat down before him.

"Do you know, I was a spoilt girl," she said. "My parents spoilt me. I'm not blaming them—I'm not blaming anybody, but I was spoilt. I've been selfish. My training made me never think of others. Your early life gave you"—she paused—"pity. I can see that now. I've thought you terribly quiet sometimes and yet I believe your happiness in the things that made you happy is far ahead of mine in my life, though people call me gay. He'll not trust me. That's what I've been thinking," she added, still thinking of herself.

"You would rather—be frank, Cynthia—have him than me? Your brief letter was confessional, told me you and he were here together and, I realise, was for legal service. But that is how you feel, isn't it?"

She looked up at him and what she saw in his sad brown eyes made her utterly candid. She noticed new

lines on his face. He seemed thinner than when she left him.

"How you are taking this?" she ejaculated, and then the answer: "I admire you. I—need him."

He thought: "In an hour of need would he be as staunch as I?" But that was an aside. It was, perhaps, an aside born of jealousy. Yet in her presence he was again devoted to her, utterly. The "blind love," no, the infatuation, returned.

"He is fond of you?" he asked. "He is really fond of you?" He spoke anxiously, desirous for certainty.

"Yes. I feel very mean, Bob. He thought you neglected me. That began it. Then—I don't know how it grew. Do you know, if he had met you often enough to really understand you I think he would have been ashamed. He would have—liked—you too."

"My dear Cynthia, we made a mistake," said Robert. He had got to it! He had achieved it! That was what he had planned to say. "That does not prevent all this being painful. Associations will prevail. If it were fifty years of association instead of five, if it were years only half-happy, there would still be associations. I can understand even a squabbling couple being hurt by separation. There would be memories of the days between the tiffs."

He gave a little laugh as though to indicate that this was all easy converse about it, that they need not be too serious—that all was for the best, no doubt.

"I'm sorry about it, of course," he went on. "It's like a journey—life, I mean; and it seems a pity when things go wrong. I'd like you to be happy."

"That's how you care for me," she said. "Why, Bob, you would love anybody! You could be good to anybody." Her voice trembled slightly. Her expression changed. "The moral side?" she asked. "Do you despise me?"

He turned and looked round the room, saw a chair and drew it close, sat down, and staring at the floor said:

"When I was a youngster on that farm I've told you about, there was a girl there. The farmer wondered once if there had been anything between us, and he talked to me." He paused. "That was a queer talk," he said as if to himself. "They come once or twice in one's life. Half in fatherly, half in man-to-man way, he talked to me. He wanted to touch my pity, waken a boy's pity. I remember his words. He told me about the girl, that she was not born in wedlock. He said: 'Her parents had no licence.'"

He was looking into distances again. His mind slipped cogs.

"What was I aiming at? Oh, yes: my thoughts about all this, an attempt to see clearly and sanely. Well, that made me sorry for her because of the way some people look on such children, though it's no fault of theirs. I'm trying to give you my thrashing out of all this, tell you how I've come where I've come. 'No licence,' you notice. Then I've got to tell you something else now. Before I met you, before we were married, years before, there was a girl. Her name was Mary. That's why I call you Cynthia."

"You love her still?" said she.

"It wasn't that. I felt it a secret dishonouring of you to call you Mary then. But you see what I'm driving at—it's an answer to your question about the moral aspect, and how I see it. I—without the licence, as that farmer said—before I met you; and you now—after our marriage. In a way it is the same sort of thing. I would be smug if I began moral talk, wouldn't I?"

"I wish I'd always been honest with you, Bob. I was not frank the day I met you—I played up to you then. I have acted parts."

Her presence excited him. She disturbed him. She made "pure reason" difficult. On her side she had admiration for the man, even respect. She had said all when she had admitted—proclaimed—that she

"needed" Lester Cochrane. Both were by now intensely strained.

"Look here," he said, "it won't hurt so devilish bad" (his grammar was discarded) "if I know that should you ever want anything—anything—you understand, you can come to me."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" she exclaimed.

"But you must promise to. You must promise. That's why I've come to see you, to get that. By God, if you don't I'll take it otherwise. I'll see him." He spread a hand in a brief gesture under the stress of emotion, gesture not natural with him. "We know nothing about life. It's short. We come. We go. The pity of it! You will, you must promise that if ever you are in trouble, and need—me—"

She sat erect. She looked very tall sitting there before him.

"I promise," she said.

He rose and she also.

"Are you going to that girl you mentioned just now, the one—before you knew me?" she asked.

"Oh, no. I don't know where she is. She was a girl who—I nearly told you about her the first time we had tea together in London. You said something then about putting covers on jam-pots. You'll have forgotten that, of course, not knowing its significance to me. That's what she did."

Cynthia stared.

"Did you love her?"

"She was very beautiful," he said.

She looked at him thoughtfully. She had her recollections. She remembered the day he took her to the empty studio (a few doors along from Wilton's home, the studio of the blue door and the wrought-iron lamp, the scraper in a hole in the wall, and with a glimpse of the grey river), and how he had said: "I love your beauty." But he speaking then prevented her saying

what was in her mind—some words to the effect that beauty was not enough.

“God bless you, Cynthia, and forgive me,” he said.

“What for?”

“For anything—everything—I may have done to help towards this.”

“You forgive me?” she asked.

“There is nothing to forgive. And I would hate to think that because of this we were as enemies. I would hate to think that if you wanted any help that I could give you would not come to me.”

“Would you come to me?” she said.

“I don’t know,” he answered, and his head went up.

They stood lost in thoughts, long thoughts. That cessation of talk left a very great quiet. He took up his hat and stick.

“Well,” he said.

She passed out of the room with him. They came to the corridor’s end, the landing. Her suite was on the second floor. He had come up in the lift, but turned to the stairs now. She could not leave him there. It had all been so different from her expectations, and she was consumed with an odd thought. It was: “What a gentleman he is!” Even more high-flown phrases were in her mind. “What a noble knight!” for example. Oh, why would such absurd phrases come up?

“Before you go, Bob—before you go—I want you to know I think you are”—she paused—“a prince of a man!” she exclaimed. There, she had said it. “I’ll walk down with you,” she added.

“Hellish wallpaper in that room,” remarked Robert.

She could not believe her ears.

“What did you say?”

“Nothing,” said he. He did not know that he had spoken.

People sitting in the foyer and in the winter-garden through which they had to pass looked at them as they moved, side by side, along the strip of carpet laid on

the large amber tiles. Cynthia drew herself up, frowning, and walked more erect across the hall. Harrison Jardine, toying with his eye-glass, observed them and then gazed circumspectly before him. He was half-hidden from the central movement of the hotel's guests by a scaly-stemmed palm in a great brass-bound tub. He had not expected Cynthia to come down with Robert. Egad, handsome woman! But it was a mistake.

"I hope to God they haven't gone and made it up," he thought. "The damned tangles people can get themselves into all for a blue eye or so."

"Well," said Robert again at the door, and held out his hand.

At the touch of her fingers his heart turned over, it seemed. He was smitten with a sense of going out to unutterable loneliness. But her grasp tightened. It was no gentle touch that, formal. It was like what in Glasgow they called "hearty grip." The sense of loneliness had instant amelioration. She was taking him at his word.

"Friends," said he. "It is the only sensible way."

He turned to go down the steps.

"Bob!"

He wheeled back to her. The revolving door that he had touched preparatory to going out spun round and round beside them. Jardine, over in his niche, wondered what was happening, his chin on his chest as if he looked at his toes but his hazed eyes observing under his brows.

"Friends?" she repeated, as if for certainty.

"I would have it that way," said he. "I am content."

The man of few gestures made a slight gesture, holding up a hand, palm open, and patting the air with it once. The gesture made, the hand was out-thrust to her.

"That's a bargain!" said he.

All their talk had been subdued on the way down and across foyer and winter-garden. Restrained he had been in manner even when urgent in thought. It had, by the signs, been all over, the farewell spoken. His hand had touched the door to go. And then he had been called back. The grip on himself was thus relaxed. His voice ("That's a bargain!") carried, stabbed through the murmur of voices in the foyer and the thin tinkle of the dolphin-fountain.

Cynthia walked away slowly, looking neither left nor right. Eyes that were upon her she did not meet. Robert passed out and left the door revolving.

Jardine sat still to give Cynthia time to mount the stairs, "playing ostrich," he said to himself, hunched behind that palm, but playing it successfully, for she did not see him. As he sat thus one of two exquisitely gowned ladies who sat near him made an exclamation.

"How extraordinary!" she said.

"What?" her companion asked.

"Those two at the door just now. That man, and the woman like Helen of Troy. Listen," and she tapped her friend on the arm, "I was in a tea-room in London —let me see, five years ago, and they were at a neighbouring table. I'm sure it was they, positive, without a doubt. His hair is less goldy now—auburn—but that's the man. And that's the woman. There was something in their manner then that made me feel there was something happening. He wrote on a card and handed it to her, and I heard him say: 'That's a bargain!' And here they are again, and that's what he said now, leaving her, after five years. I'm so curious I could follow her upstairs and implore explanation on my knees. She is a beauty, too. Isn't it queer? I often think if we only knew the lives of everybody sitting round about in a place like this——"

She had been speaking loud enough for Jardine to hear every word, had indeed looked beyond her friend and seen the dreaming, elderly and entirely correctly

attired gentleman in absent manner playing pendulum with a single eyeglass. Her friend agreed.

“Yes, I know. Even the life of this old——”

“Hush!”

Jardine rose and passed out. Robert was just outside looking this way and that for him.

“Here we are,” said Jardine, and scooped his eyeglass into his eye-socket. He felt that he might be about to hear things that would call for a non-committal and set face. The eyeglass helped, a weapon of defence that he had taken to long ago when, before he had turned to the intensive study of pictures and art criticism, he had been in the diplomatic service.

“Ah, there you are. Well, Jardine, Jardine, that is over.”

Jardine elevated his brows and catching the dropped monocle in a cupped hand put it in his pocket.

The two ladies, having followed him out, looked one to another.

“Now that just shows you that it is not safe to talk in public places,” said the curious one. “I wonder what that was all about?”

They would know in a few weeks when Cynthia’s photograph was again in the papers.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ROBERT had thought out an attitude to the case. He had pursued a policy, things being as they were, that seemed the only right one. Cynthia’s mere proximity during that interview in Paris had at moments shaken him. But now, abruptly, back in his studio in London, there came to him a consciousness of freedom and of happiness routing loneliness and regrets from dominance. A man is not a mood. He is a complexity. He may be at once sad and glad. He may be at one and the same time cast down and rejoicing.

Now he had relief from that infatuation that Jean Scott had seen evidence of, five years earlier, when he walked home with her and her mother from the little northern station. Calm followed fever. As when he had risen from his bed after physical illness, and saw the studio as though swept and garnished and renewed, so now again he saw it with a restored and tranquil vision.

Legal proceedings had to be entered upon. Then there were days when Cynthia was at the West Park Street house. He knew she was there. That had all been decided upon. She having taken away what she wanted he was to remove what he desired to retain ; and after that there would be an auction sale, arranged by the lawyers. She took him at his word—"Friends." There came a ring on the telephone bell.

"Hullo ? "

"Hullo, Bob ! "

Her voice—and his new-found peace was shaken. She wanted to make an inquiry regarding the whereabouts of certain keys. She might have got one of the servants to phone, "but I did not like to do that." He gave her the information and then nearly cried out : "Cynthia, Cynthia, can't we come together again ?"—he who had been happy in a sense of freedom.

"All right, thank you," she said, and was gone from the phone in West Park Street. He pictured her walking away from it.

That was the last of her, a voice on the telephone.

The studio then was empty to him as the West Park Street house had been after she went to Algiers. He could not stand it. He prepared to go out, had an arm in coat-sleeve, when suddenly he bethought him that she might have occasion to ring again. She might phone when he was out. He stayed, less for her sake, to give any desired information, than to hear her voice again should she ring up. He called himself a fool at last, sitting there only ostensibly reading, waiting for the telephone bell to sound. She was another man's, he told

himself. Never having looked upon her as his property, always having regarded her as a free agent, that remark to himself was not as forceful as otherwise it might have been. What a spell she had for him ! How that disembodied voice had moved him !

After the house in West Park Street was but a shell, and the *To Let* board was in place, Robert felt that a period had truly ended, and again he knew elation. It would be mock sentiment, it would be pathetic, to pretend otherwise : he was convalescent from his passion.

He went to see the doctor, to settle his bill. It seemed to him ridiculously small.

“ I owe you more than that,” he declared.

“ What for ? ”

“ Why, for all your visits.”

“ Nonsense ! It has been a great pleasure to me to see you pull round. I helped nature, perhaps. My satisfaction in knowing you are able to go on afresh is enough for me. Look here, I’ll let you give me a picture.”

“ What one would you like ? ”

“ I’ll come and choose it.”

That gave Robert a thought regarding Nellie MacKay of the jolly eyes, the jolly laugh, the remarks sometimes near the knuckle followed by a departing chortle. There was one of his pictures that specially engaged her. He would send her that.

When the divorce proceedings were over he felt that he had to get away. He would go to Scotland, to Glasgow. On the day of his departure there were several to see him off. Jardine of course was there, Wilton too ; Rathbone of the Rathbone Galleries, who happened to be in London, and Smithson the agent who handled his etchings. A round dozen were assembled when Miss MacKay came panting to the platform.

“ I’m all out of puff ! ” said she. She had just received the painting that afternoon, having been away on an out-of-town case till then.

There came a lull to the noises of the station, rattle of trucks, hiss of steam. Through an arch at the side encroached the sounds of the streets—the jingle of harness-chains, the cymbals, the triangles, the drumming of hoofs. The guard was out in the middle of the platform, looking along the train with an air of ownership, flag in one hand and the other fumbling with the chain of his whistle.

“Well,” said Robert, and stepped into the compartment.

Serena to Cork, Cork to—— the whistle was blown. Their hands were all at the window for a farewell grasp. The train moved out, picking up speed at every revolution of the wheels, with a remarkable smoothness. It was as if the station platform was withdrawn from it. He watched his friends turn away. The red-haired girl from Rona was slowly stepping backwards. He had promised to remember her when looking across from Rathay, for he would visit Rathay, surely. Suddenly an arc-light under the smoky glass roof sputtered, sizzled up. Jardine walked quickly to that bluish pool of light. He could not see whether Robert was still leaning from the window, but if he was that spot-light, Jardine knew, would reveal him to his friend. In the midst of the circle of radiance he raised a hand in a salute as of benediction.

“My God, it’s good to have friends,” muttered Robert and sat down.

He thought of the doctor whom he had seen that morning as he left the studio. The doctor had hoped to come and see him off but had not been sure if he’d manage to. “Another life expected into the world this evening,” he had said. “I’ll try to dash up, but if I don’t you’ll know I’ve had a hurry call, there, or somewhere.”

“A doctor, that’s the profession of professions,” he ruminated. “One’s doing something for humanity as a doctor, alleviating pain, helping toward the healthy mind in the healthy body.”

The locomotive's whistle sounded as from very far ahead. The train was going so fast that the blast, though not greatly prolonged, gave an impression of swift travel. In his berth he stretched out very happily. There was always something delightful to him in the diminutive flying bedroom of a train. It made him think of "take hold of the wings of the morning"; it made him think of trailing on a comet's tail, but comfortable. It made him think of *At the Back of the North Wind*. A travelling bed: if he lived to be an old man might he still be boy enough to chuckle to himself over the thrill of it, the fun of it, the romance of the reality of it.

Lulled by the easy rolling of the wheels, he slept. He dreamt that he was on board a ship. Sometimes there would be a rush of waves over the port-hole, flurrying, flurrying, and gone. He dreamt of fogs—which did not mean, of necessity, that he was obviously in a mental fog. A more simple explanation was in the whistle of the locomotive. Once he woke because the boat had stopped. He slightly raised his head to give ear. There was a dripping of water. Then he heard the clip of a hammer on a wheel, the dull whack of the lid of a grease-box dropped. Why, of course, he was in a train. He stretched out with a sigh of content. The wheels revolved again.

This, it seems, brings us to the end of what Jardine, in his monograph, refers to as the Middle Period, Robert going to sleep in his rushing bed with a chuckle over the fun of it.

CHAPTER XXXV

"CARRY your bag, sir? Cry ye a cab, sir? A hansom, mister?"

Raucous voices of gamins, gutter-snipes, greeted him. The uniformed railway porters ordered them away;

the station policemen pointed at them and they fled with the flip-flap of bare feet, or the clatter of "tacketty" soles, to the station's end, there to wait for clients.

"Matches! Box o' lights! Wax vestas! *Murray's Diary!* *Herald!* *Herald!*"

Robert nodded to the hotel porter who stood near. That juggler with baggage tucked a suitcase under each arm, with a sag at the knees caught up in his hands two more (the property of other guests for his house), and hustled off.

"It's only a step or two," he said.

The gamins at the barrier followed to the hotel door, as though to see the last of these possible clients who had escaped them. In the entrance Robert felt in a pocket, turned back to them and grinned.

"Here," said he, "seeing you did not get a chance to carry them this will atone."

They listened with open mouths, as though open mouths as well as ears might aid toward understanding the speech's full significance.

"Thank you, sir. Good-luck, sir."

It was all "good-luck" now. The doctor in London had wished him that and affirmed he wanted to see him start afresh after his illness ("My satisfaction in knowing you are able to go on is enough for me!"), Jardine had wished him "good-luck" with the last handshake.

In the hotel another attendant, receiving the key of a room from the clerk, took him in charge, grabbed up his bags and led the way to the lift. The long corridor to which he mounted was a perspective of central carpet with a slender margin of polished floor; and of globes of ceiling-lights overhead like transparent and encrusted bowls of ice, each, by the illusion of distance, smaller and smaller to the far end; and of diminishing doors on either side. Two chamber-maids like mannequins were in that corridor. The first he passed without a glance. The second was just at the door at which the Boots stopped.

Robert met her eye. What happened in it? What was that flick like a match struck? There was a stab at his heart as he passed on remembering, at that glance, the second Mary—the original of his Helen of the Factories. He was subdued with a sense of life's loneliness. Would that one knew in youth what remembering there would be in later years.

The Boots stood in the room, having put the bags in place. Robert forgot him.

“This is your key, sir.”

“Key? Oh, yes, thank you. Yes, one needs a key.”

The lad laughed as though that were a priceless joke.

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.” He accepted his tip with a bow and bobbed out backwards.

The past was over—over and done with—except what was treasurable in it. He exorcised the melancholy that had assaulted, invaded him. Regrets were of no avail. Yes, one could learn of experience, he told himself, but regrets were futile. The rivers flowed on unceasing. Faces came out of the crowds and passed. He must begin afresh.

He opened the tall windows of the bedroom and sat down in a chair before them. Nice chairs they had in these hotels! There was a big building opposite, doric columns set in front of it on either side of the ground floor's and first storey's bowed and gleaming windows. On the ledge they supported a row of pigeons sat preening. He was reminded thereby of Sir Ewart Lang. An easier memory!

“Matches! Box o' lights! Wax vestas! *Murray's Diary!*”

The voices came up to him from the station entry. Long ago that had all been a strange din to him. These voices had told him how far he had come from the Spanish speech and the sunshine in which it was spoken; Serena, Peru, to Cork; Cork to Greenock; Greenock to Glasgow; a hazy smoky roof of glass and these voices. That husky timbre was inherited, perhaps.

Strange that these husky voices should move him so.

Those columns ! What was it about grace, about beauty, that was so touching, pinching the heart ? A flurry of wings and a folding of them. A pigeon had alighted atop the stone balustrade before the window and at once, with iridescent inflated breast, began to waltz and coo, looking over the edge. Amused by its persistence, its waltzing and cooing and peerings over the edge, he stepped slowly forward to discover if he could where was the one to whom all these remarks were being made. It emitted a pigeon's " Oh ! " of startlement and flew. The clatter of its wings raised the others below. They flapped, they sailed, they wheeled, whirring in the restricted confines of the street.

A man coming from the station was looking up at them. Robert stared at him. He knew that walk. He knew that pipe. He knew that man. But was it ? Yes. The big hooked pipe in his clenched hand was evidence, though Broughton had been putting on flesh enough to make Robert, at first sight, uncertain of his identity. Only one pipe for Sam. He had the makers' number of it and when one aged he bought another of the same. Yes, Broughton without doubt. He was carrying a parcel, too, in the typical Broughton manner.

Robert leaned out and waved. His friend was watching the alighting pigeons in the street below.

" Broughton ! " he called.

Broughton did not hear. He turned into the hotel entrance, became a hat, the top of a hat, with feet peeping in and out vigorously under it.

Robert hurried along the corridor and pressed the lift bell. By the time he came into the hallway, Broughton was surrendering his parcel and hat to the attendant at the dining-room door. Robert made up on him just inside the room as the head-waiter approached, and put a hand on his discoverer's shoulder.

" Broughton swung round. He stared. He clutched Robert's hand and still holding it turned to the waiter.

" Two," he said. " Over there, beside that fire-place."

Broughton talked of himself at first. He did not know how to approach inquiries regarding Robert's affairs. He had a house in the country—not by Loch Lomond now.

" Ah, but of course you know all that. I've written to you since we moved to the Campsies. Betty is getting a little bit—well, stout," he said.

They had been in Skye all the last summer. His son had come up for a couple of weeks of tramping and climbing and fishing.

" Very keen he is on his profession," he said. He paused and looked up at Robert. He was one of these men who eat humped over plates, making plunges. " We have all we need. It has been a long struggle but it has been worth it. I am glad you are back here. We want a man who can feel the people here. You ought to get a dog." That remark, coming whence it did, from a thought of Robert's lonely state, made him suddenly avert his eyes and apply himself to his chop. " We have a great dog," he explained hurriedly. " But you'll come out and see us."

" I needn't tell you I'd be delighted to. Where is Raeburn living now ? "

" Not far from us. He's a sort of emeritus master. Comes in about once a month to the school. It's in new quarters. Did you know ? "

" Yes. He wrote to me at the time of the removal."

" The *flitting* ! Aye, aye. Well, he can't rest out there, though. When he is not painting he is making the villagers get up plays—you know, morality plays, that sort of thing, folk plays. He paints the scenery. He's got all the yokels acting now. He tells me a few are picked as character actors, but most because they look the parts. So he has to choose plays with characters in them that look like what his yokels will look

like when disguised in togas and things. I went out once when he had a rehearsal on. It was a scream. The blacksmith got on his high horse, did not like some suggestions, and then Fra got nettled and told him he was there to bring out any art he might have in him. ' You're here to make a bloody fool of me,' said the blacksmith. And Fra said : ' I can only bring out what is in you.' Oh, a scream. But he pulled them together. You know, between ourselves, Bob, Fra is a greater teacher than painter. I don't care what the art is—he feels it. One of the most lovable of men. You knew his mother died last year ? "

" Yes. I wrote to him when I heard."

" Let me see, you never met his wife ? That was before you knew him. There, now there, was a charming woman. Fra felt the loss of her terribly."

Broughton perceived himself again tactlessly on the verge of what might perhaps be to Robert a painful subject. There had not been a word in even oblique allusion to the recent troubles in London. Of course Broughton knew of them—the papers had seen to that. His old protégé, he noted, had changed, was thinner, though to be sure not cadaverous. He noted that the mouth corners, that used to twist up as though shaped by laughter and happiness, had frequently a downward curve or pucker. That Robert's hair was now brown with but glints of gold was a change less indicative, he considered, of what life had done with him. The years alone, sad or merry, would have wrought that difference. What Robert's thoughts on his own case might be he wondered. He had altered but was not downcast, though of course, Broughton knew, he would not wear his heart on his sleeve.

Lunch being over, Broughton asked Robert if he would be ready that afternoon when he looked in to go home with him.

In that old refurnished farm-house (a very pleasant home near a village of rooks in the tops of high elms),

happiness lived. Robert felt it on entering. An Airedale dog, corveting to meet its master, took Robert's hat from him, standing up on straining legs, its remains of a tail whirling, and hung up the hat.

"Betty! Come and see who's here."

Mrs. Broughton came into the hall, as her husband said—well, stout. She had mellowed. The look in her eyes was very charming, kindly.

"I am glad to see you," she said.

But there are other ways of interchange of thought and feeling than speech. "I'm very sorry about it and we'll say no more. Let it be as if we did not know." That may seem a lot for a buxom lady to suggest by a look and a handshake, and a hand on his elbow to indicate to him which of the many low doors opened upon the room into which he was to go. But that is what she conveyed.

It was a long room—two of the old farm-house rooms, by the demolishing of a wall, made into one—low ceilinged, made to seem longer than it was by a great convex mirror between the windows at the far end, the room reflected in it in receding glints and lustrous glooms. Robert recalled Jardine's "No artist's home should be without one," and instantly his host and hostess saw that he was not there with them. He was far away, with Jardine. There was a revolving door in a Paris hotel. He had been called back, just after he had set it spinning, for a last word. And that last word (he having thought the interview within, that had been ordeal enough to him, was all over) had affected him deeply. Again he spun the door. He came out, in the wild complexity of life, relieved and sad, happy and unutterably lonely. And Jardine, who had promised to be awaiting him, was not there. Then—"Here we are," had come his voice. How happy the Broughtons were together! Happiness was in the room with them.

He was far off. Sam and Mrs. Broughton exchanged looks. They could not know precisely where he was,

but they guessed the neighbourhood. They could not surmise how he felt about the end of his married life, but some effect it had. They could see that. It was not just a trifle.

The next day Broughton suggested, over lunch, going into the village to order a conveyance of some sort to drive them over to see Raeburn.

“He may not be at home,” said his wife.

“We’ll risk it.”

“Well, I only say it, not to depress you with pessimistic forebodings, but so that if he is not at home you will not be angry and swear.”

“*Très bien*,” said Broughton.

Half an hour later they were being bowled along rural roads through odours of turnips and hawthorn, and arrived at Raeburn’s. A tall man, but bowed, opened the door. Robert wanted to draw his lined face on the instant. Mr. Raeburn, he said, was in Glasgow. But he knew his duties, inviting them to go in and have tea.

“No, we won’t, thank you. Yes, we will. I want my friend to see the house,” said Broughton.

Robert was staring at the major-domo. When they were left in the sitting-room he said: “I seem to have seen that old fellow before. I’m always feeling like that now, as if I’d done and seen things before.”

“You have seen him. He used to be a model at the Raeburn School.”

Mattio returned with a folding table and a broidered cloth.

“Don’t you remember me, Mattio?” asked Robert.

“Well, sir, your face is familiar.”

“At the Art School?”

“Well, well, I do declare, Bobby—you’ll excuse me, sir, but I don’t remember you but as Bobby. I used to hear the men there call you Bobby.”

“I remember once,” said Robert, “you came to look at what I was drawing. I wasn’t working at an easel but on a board, and the sheet of paper stuck

out over it. The paper cut you right along the waist."

"Fancy remembering that!" exclaimed Mattio. "I don't remember that time specially. I did that more than once, I can tell you, walking round to look at a drawing during the rests. It is wonderful how sharp paper can be."

He had lost almost all of the foreign accent that Robert recalled.

"Let me see, you won the Apsley Bursary one year and went to Anticoli-Corrado," said the expatriate old model.

"Yes," said Robert.

"I was born there," Mattio said.

"You were! Don't you ever want to go back?"

"Not now. Not now I am with meester——" the accent slipped out—"Raeburn."

He bowed to them half apologetic, as though he thought the talk had been too long, and hurried away. He was not obsequious but he had a great respect for artists. Other people were just people. After tea they passed through the house to a large room to rear and there, facing Robert as he entered, was *Helen of the Factories*. A side door was open, and Mr. and Mrs. Broughton went out to look at the garden.

"God!" muttered Robert. "I was happy in the days when I painted that."

That's what he thought. He thought he had been happy then. Well—he had been. But he had been troubled too. Thus considered in retrospect they were happy days, days of the stimulus of the talk with Raeburn's "men" of the school, the agonies over the "hellish posters," the clay-blocks of criminals and witnesses, forgotten, it seemed.

Where was she now—the original, that *Helen of the Factories*? Would he know her if he saw her? How would she be changed? Would there not be traces, perhaps more than traces, of the pathos that is in *La*

Belle Heaulmiere? He came as near in that room to prayer for the frail creature as men can come to prayer without kneeling, when their hearts are moved, thinking of people known of old and lost in the crowds, wishing them well, wishing them well, remembering them.

There were other paintings in that studio that he had seen before. He wandered from room to room. All the doors were wide open. He went up a narrow stair to a landing beside a deep embrasured window. In that niche, to one side, was that study of a hand that used to be in Fra's room at School, to the other the drawing of a foot with its tracery of veins, that had been part of the quietness of that room. A sense of tranquillity possessed him. He had a feeling of having come home.

"Are you there, Bob?" hailed Broughton.

"Yes, I'm coming."

CHAPTER XXXV

HERE he was not at his journey's end. He felt himself nearer to that when he saw the Isle of Rathay change from a grey-blue wall (deckle-edged atop, veined with silver, and with the cone he knew for Rathay Fell like a volcano under a shred of dun cloud) to a land that had contours. As the steamer surged on toward it, it thrust out promontories like the front of the crouching Sphinx; it drew in bays and strewed them with dull gold.

There was no great bluff boat out in Dulse Bay waiting for them, or coming wallowing slowly out of the troughs, one rower standing to a sweep, the other sitting on a thwart, slewed round, to look at them over a shoulder. There was a pier in the midst of that circle of sand fringed with white. The laird (the former laird's son) had allowed that at least, a concession to modernity.

Robert had stayed with the Broughtons till the end

of the week and here was Sunday, but any day might be Sunday away back in these dozing glens. There was a stranger to Robert in charge of the pier and to him he gave temporary care of his bag and a package (not unwonted in appearance to the pierman—for more and more did painters come to the island) of canvases.

“There’s no postcart the day, whatever. I dinna ken if ye can get a vehicle. There’s no machine I can think of.”

Machine did not mean motor-car, for motor-cars were not yet common. Then the pier-master saw a man on the road and—

“Oh, Angus!” he shouted. “Was ye telling me ye was for Waterfoot the day?”

“Aye.”

“This gentleman here—could ye give him a lift to the Pebble Glen?”

“I could indeed.”

“Ye go wi’ him, sir.”

“I’ll be the noo,” the man Angus called over his shoulder.

Robert strolled after him to that old inn, the interior of which he knew. He had been a proud young drover there. There he had heard of his grandfather, and of his mother as a child, his informant unaware to whom he spoke. The man Angus went into the yard, passed to the stable.

Opposite was a little church and a voice droned within. Then there was singing, in Gaelic, of which Robert did not know enough to follow. He walked to and fro. Queer, thought he, the effect of voices singing in unison. Church had never given him what he needed. He had not been devout in that way. He had painted, also, two Successful Parsons and listened to them while he painted. The singing ceased. There was an interim with the drone of the voice, and then again singing—in English. Lyte’s “Abide With Me” they sang. The voices poignantly, beseechingly soared, while through

and between the stanzas the waves crashed on the shingle and slid backwards with a raking roar.

What was it all about ? Was it all hallucination ? Were they going into a darkness with no dawn ? Pattern there was, he could see that. He'd had glimpses of pattern, often ; but the final, the whole pattern : would one ever see that ? The voices rose supplicant and triumphant, ending the hymn as the " machine " came from the inn yard.

" Is yon your bag and parcel at the pier ? " asked the driver.

" Yes."

" We'll just pick them up and get awa'."

The mare was fresh and, tossing her head, beat a tattoo of hoofs, erratic at times as if in a hint of an intended bolt. The wind whipped her mane and their faces. There was the impression of going even quicker than they were because of that ~~rush~~ of breeze to meet them. They spun round the big bend, Angus restraining the eager mare. The sloping lands were to left and away below the whitewash of the coastguard station was a wild blue, the quality that woods take on such days it also taking.

" Oh, here's a man wi' a travelling stallion ! I hope the mare doesna nicker. Ye never ken what will happen with a mare meeting a stallion."

She arched her neck and Angus gave her a flick of the whip to deflect her attention. The man with the stallion was tramping ahead with panther-like strides, out of the corner of an eye looking up at his great horse. Angus gave the mare another flick and she dashed on. Behind they heard the man with the stallion talking comfortingly, insidiously to his charge.

They rolled on and under the passage of the clouds coming reeking out of the south-west, entered the green and dusky tunnel of the wood that had been " the planting " in a former life that Robert had lived there. A hundred yards on the mare slowed down of her own

accord. Then the smiddy showed by the roadside ahead.

" Is John Reid still here ? " asked Robert.

" Ye ken John Reid ? A fine fella. Yes, this is his smiddy."

" Colin Dunlop—where is he ? "

" Oh, he's gone to his lang hame. But Reid had bought the place before that. Aye, John Reid was an orphan boy—but maybe ye ken that, kenning him—sent here in the ordinary way they send lads from the institutions, but he's a real islander noo."

Angus slowed down and it seemed by his next comment that he must have been struck by the appearance of the place as it struck Robert. Some quality in the light no doubt aided, and a drift of old chestnut leaves against the closed door gave it an appearance as if forsaken.

" You'd think to look at it that it was shut for ever," he declared. " Just Sunday. That's all."

" It does look forsaken," Robert agreed.

" Aye, it does that but the seeming is no' always the truth. And there's a parable for ye ! It will be open the morn."

He clicked to the mare and she stepped on again. Then——

" Just take a look, will ye ? " said Angus. " Do you see what I see ? At the cross-roads there. Would ye no' say it was Jesus Christ standing there ? And the light through a hole in the clouds on him and all. I'm no' being profane, ye ken. I have great respect and reverence for Jesus Christ. He was wonderful. But ye see the likeness."

He reined in and Robert alighted.

" So it's you, Rab," said Ian, taking his hand. " I was down at the laigh pasture and I had a feeling somebody was coming. Then I heard the wheels and so I waited. And it was you was coming."

"Do I offer to pay this gentleman?" Robert whispered.

"No, no. Ye'll insult him. How are ye, Angus?"

"Brawly, brawly. Thank ye for speiring. Well," and he handed down the bag and parcel, "could anything have been better? Him waiting here just as if he was expecting ye, and all planned."

"Look in some time, Angus, when ye're passing."

"I will indeed."

Robert thanked him for the lift.

"That's all right," he said. "Anything I can do for a friend of Ian's. Get up!"

Ian stooped and took the bag, swung the parcel under his arm, and two dogs, at these signs of movement, uncoiled among the grass by the road-side, stretched, and with swaying tails padded close.

"No, no, Mr. MacCulloch," said Robert. It was always "Mr. MacCulloch," as from the first.

"Och aye, I can carry them. I was resting this morning. I didna go over the hills, so I came down to see the sheep in the laigh pasture this afternoon. I've been sitting looking at yon clouds."

"You mustn't take them both," said Robert in haste. Ian's shoulders showed a stoop now though, facially, he seemed unchanged, save for a slightly drawn appearance over the cheek-bones, suggesting that, strong and tenacious though his frame, he was often now physically tired with his labours.

"Well, here, you take the canvases. I'll take the bag."

"No. The bag is heavier."

"See, now," said Ian, "ye're no' going to wrangle wi' me at the start. And ye used to do just precesely what I telt ye!"

Robert looked down at the dogs that gazed up at him.

"I know neither of them," said he.

"No, man," said Ian. "I wish a dog lived longer on all counts, baith for the training of them and for the

bereavement when they go. I cry them the old names, though. That's Bruce and that's Wally."

They wagged as in response to the introduction and fell in at heel.

As Ian and Robert started upon the trudge uphill there came to them from the top of the next rise the voice of the driver of the gig, Angus, bellowing triumphant under the sweeping clouds :

“ Change and decay in all around I see ;
O Thou, Who changest not, abide with me.”

It seemed, walking up the lane, as if they would soon come to where the moving clouds skimmed the crests, but as they mounted the sky mounted. Ian stopped.

“ We'll have a breathing spell,” he said. “ Hills get steeper as one grows older. And that reminds me, I must tell ye about Mary. If ye was to go in unwarned ye might make some look of astonishment. She has kind of shrunken. And ye see it in her joints too. She has a terrible time with the rheumatisms. Oh, man, the clash when folks found out, after my mither died, that the orra man was sleeping in the wee cottage there and me and Mary at the farm. Ah weel, folks canna help seeing things the way they do. And as long as the world lasts folks will aye see things differently, nae doot. Not but what there was excuse for them, maybe. Nature is Nature, and if ony of them had been left alone wi' one o' the ither sex doubtless they micht ha' gotten busy.” He gave a tolerant little chuckle.

Here was Mr. MacCulloch loquacious indeed. It struck Robert that he was glad to have some one to talk to about this gossip.

“ Do ye ken,” he continued, “ one thing kept me patient over the clash and clavers, and that was that I was minded I had once been doubtful about you and Mary. But then ye were two warm young people together. However, as I say, I minded on that and I

thinks to myself : ' I'm no' different from them after all.' Just a few busybodies there were and the itherers were disgusted, but there's folks has nothing to do and not enough to think about. They will aye be making a stramash."

Robert nodded.

" I thought maybe I should suggest marrying the lass, if she'd have me, so that folk wouldna look askance upon her. I asked her one day if they ever said anything to her about living here all alone with two men—that was the way I put it—and she says : ' If they do, what does it matter ? I look upon ye as my faither and my brither,' says she. Ye ken that made it I didna care twa damns what any of them said. And as soon as I felt like that it just stopped. I let it worry me more than I needed to. Folks pay ower much attention to the wrong side of life, I think. There is a real life and a false life, and one shouldna be put off the real by those that are living the false."

They mounted to the yard. Mary's eyes were what Robert first saw as she looked up on their entrance. He had not expected, after Ian's warning, to see her looking so well. Her old colour was still marked, though she was truly no longer the big lump. She limped to him. She held out her hand.

" I thought ye would come back," she said. " I was sure ye would come back. Ye have your bag. Ye're stopping."

She considered him, head on side.

" Ye are no' so greatly changed," said she. " But your hair is no' carrots or ginger at all noo," and she smiled, the old dancing light in her eyes. " It's broon wi' glints intil't. Ye hae gotten a wee pang line doon aither jaw. Ah, weel, here you are ! I'll milk the night, Mr. Ian. Ye'll be wanting to crack richt away wi' him."

" No, no," replied Ian. " That's all right. Come along, Rab, and we'll get the milking done and be

finished and free for the evening. We have but three cows now, whatever."

The cows were waiting, full-uddered, at the gate. It had but to be opened and they passed into the byre.

"Get two pails and I'll milk one," said Robert for though milking had not been one of his duties in the old days he had, of course, to learn how to do it.

"Have ye still got the knack?" asked Ian. "Well, we'll see. I havena two stools. Here, I'll sit on this auld pail turned upside down."

Robert had not lost the knack. He had not forgotten what to do when the cow would persist in thrashing him across the face with flailing tail, caught its tufted end, sat on it, and had an amazing thrill of delight doing so. It provided the flattering emotion of being past-master, adept. When they returned to the house Mary had set up a clothes-drying stand to one side of the fire, and over it, for airing, hung fluffy blankets and sheets.

The table was set for supper. The peat-divots made small puffing sounds, exuded blue flames, shot out yellow ones. Robert saw the old black tea-caddy with the gilded dragon ramping on it. Imagine an old tea-caddy taking part in a conspiracy of peace, in the creation of a sense of beatific return! The big kettle pendant from its hook made droning sounds as of content.

During the meal Robert felt that something was wrong here. No Mrs. MacCulloch; no Agnes MacCulloch. He tried to pretend to himself that Agnes was away for a holiday in Glasgow. Mary sat to one end of the table to serve the dishes and pour tea, Ian on her right hand, Robert on her left. Robert was facing the deep-set window. The moors rolled outside. Against the last of a red sunset he saw the edges of the crests, looked again at the very undulations, hummocks and notches that many a time he had looked at from there.

What Mrs. Broughton had conveyed (if it was not all in his imagination—which of course it was not) by a look and a manner, Mary let him have in direct speech.

"We were real sorry about all that we read in the paper, Rab," said she.

Ian glanced from one to the other. He had said nothing about it. He wondered if this was wise. But it was typical of the bold lass, whose boldness was of a very genial sort.

"John Reid used to have her picture on the smiddy wall doon there," she said. "He would tell folks, 'Ye mind the lad that was learning the sheep-farming up at Pebble Glen? Well, yon's his wife.' Aye. And they'd read: 'The beautiful wife of Robert Barclay, the celebrated portrait painter.'"

Ian looked very troubled. He stroked his beard and glanced from Robert to Mary.

"'He should never have given up the sheep-farming,' I told John when we saw in the papers about ye. We was real sorry for ye, Rab. But John Reid said that what had to be, had to be, and that it might be all for the best. It's the way ye take things, ye see. When I was in bed with the rheumatisms I used to fret. I used to greet. I couldna get out and do my work. But there is good can come out of things that maybe ye would rather not have had."

She looked at her twisted right hand, rubbed her left over the swollen joints. Supper finished she brought a tray and put the dishes on it. Robert, thrusting before her, took it up and carried it away.

"I'll dry them for you," said he.

"No, no," she said. "You stay with Mr. Ian and talk."

They sat down and chatted about the old days (Mary, the dishes washed, joining them), about who was left, who was married, the children they had. Twilight filled the room and twilight peace, and Ian lit the lamp. They told him of winter gales, wrecks in the Sound. And then Mary said it was time she went to bed.

"I'll leave you together," she said, "I'll see ye in the morning, Rab. Good-night."

"Good-night Mary," said Robert, rising.

Ian glanced at him, puzzled a moment, and then shambingly rose also. Mary smiled at them. The quiet beauty in her eyes struck Robert, great dark eyes. He had known women of what is called culture who had no such tenderness in what was behind these windows, mockery, derision, heartlessness instead.

"I hope ye didna mind what Mary said," remarked Ian, when she was gone.

"Not at all. I liked it."

"She means well."

"I know."

Moisture from the thatch tip-tapped, tip-tapped outside one of the windows which was slightly open. They sat looking at the fire, the "fuffin' lowe." The silence was long, profound, full of peace. Ian was evidently on the same theme when he spoke again.

"She has a big heart," he said. "It is the way folk mean things that matters."

"Certainly." Mary's eyes haunted him.

"I've often thought of you on the moors," said Ian, interrupting his reverie. "I've aye, speaking for myself, liked best the place where one can just see inland, hills after hills. You liked best where you could look out beyond the island. But for baith of us, the traveller and bide-at-home, it is what happens here"—he touched his forehead—"that matters."

After that speech there was another long silence while the drops tip-tapped outside.

"I'd like to make a painting of you, Mr. MacCulloch," said Robert.

"Ye would, would ye? That would be a great honour to me, Rab. I ken fine ye are a famous penter. And ye are ma freend. But ye'll be wanting to go to bed. Ye'll have your own auld room up above."

"But don't you sleep there now?"

"No, no. I sleep in the next hoose, the one the

visitors have in summer. The orra-man (he's off for the day) sleeps in the cottage below."

Robert, recalling the talk on the way up, stared at him and then began to laugh. Ian understood that stare and laughter.

"Did ye think I'd explain to them that I dinna sleep in the same hoose with her?" he asked. "Not likely! It was none of their business. And it's but a wee detail whatever."

He threw the blankets over his shoulder and taking up a candle mounted the stairs beyond the door that was like a cupboard door. When he came down they went into the yard together. As they stood there a light sprang up below.

"There's the orra-man hame. He aye goes to some ither place for his Sunday supper. We'll give the dogs a run afore they sleep."

They walked slowly to the upper gate, passed through, and under the half-moon moved slowly on. A wind sighed up there over the heather. They strolled back to the farm. The dogs appeared after them out of the gloom. Two of them Ian sent into the main farm, the other he told to come with him.

"I'll just step in and see ye up the stairs," he said, and stood beside the lamp at the table while Robert passed up.

When Robert entered his old bedroom, a candle alight, there in its sconce on the small dressing table, he had the feeling that the intervening years were a dream. The bed was made. The walls enclosed the old quiet out of the troubles of the world. It was long before he pinched out the light, lying there listening to the tip-tap of the moisture draining from the eaves and the intermittent sigh of a wind, contented sigh, in the night's immense quiet.

Here he would forget bitterness. Here he would forget disappointment. Here he would prepare again for travel. He would do work yet that would make that

dear man, the doctor, doubly glad of his success in "helping Nature" to pull him round to go on again. He thought of his grandfather. Jardine, in his *Six Self-Effacing Masters* (on the title-page of it is, for text, "Inheritors of unfulfilled renown . . .") had an essay on Gartmore's work. Robert had a few sentences of that essay by heart, and recalled them then :

"Places, according to the coteries outlandish, he favoured. They could not understand what took him there and even without visiting them they damned them at a venture as uninhabitable, and called Gartmore queer. He had a love for the unsophisticated round him, though every scratch and every ploughing of his needle showed how sensitive an artist he was."

Oh, it was good to be here again, to see Ian and Mary again. He fell asleep to the sigh of a wind over the hills in place of the late drumming of hoofs and jingle of bells of hansom-cabs taking people home from the play.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ROBERT (it was perhaps a fortnight later), washing the dishes for Mary, and she drying them, was aware of a great happiness and contentment. It was just as he dried the washing-up bowl and hung it on its nail that Ian entered to ask if he was ready for the hills.

Rathay Fell over a near hummock was a cut amethyst set in cold blue. They came to a high roll whence they could see far out, over the Sound, to Rona ; and there Robert thought of his nurse, of the happy times with her in the studio during his convalescence, the laughter they had shared. And suddenly there came Mary Cynthia's voice, as if in his ears again : "Why, Bob, you would love anybody . . ." He loved the red-haired Nellie MacKay ; he loved the dark-haired Mary

Argyll. It was good to be alive, feeling love for humanity instead of tired and bored.

"The day-nurse when I was ill came from Rona," said he in explanation of his halt.

"Oh, aye. Did she indeed? Of course, yes—ye were ill as well as having all your trouble. Mr. Broughton mentioned it to me at the time," said Ian, and then bit his lip. Mary's frank way of talk was not for him.

"If one could only go back instead of forward," said Robert.

"Man, man, ye mustn't say that! It's not as if ye had taken the wrong turning," Ian replied at once with profound comprehension. "Ye might want to go back if ye was off the road. I feel ye are on the right road, Rab."

The picture of Ian progressed and was, Robert believed, the best thing he had done in his life. He made also many sketches of him from which, later, there would be an etching or two. And of Mary he had done two chalk drawings. Twice in his life he had loathed the tools of his trade, but now, when he woke at morning and saw them lying in the room the sight of them was pleasure. A little piece of charcoal, even it was good to see with its satiny sheen. He must keep his thumb on this. There were people who would say he was mad, mad to love a piece of charcoal! He'd be loving the bottle of fixative next, and its rubber bulb!

There were hours here of a peace that he had not known, save fragmentarily, of late. In the mornings he would lie looking at the tones on the ceiling, at the folds of the curtain bordering the window. A hen's preliminary crooning drawl and final cluck out in the yard accentuated the quiet. He would lie a while like a child turning a kaleidoscope, just letting the pictures, filed away, drift before him: a sky all blue, a windy day, a dancing sea, and a ship in full sail well over the horizon, the hull visible, a heliographing twinkle of sun on canvas. From far back that picture came. But

there were others from even further. A string of yoked bullocks, two by two, and at the end of them dust-clouds hiding the wagon they hauled ; and in the dust a man with a long pole, spiked at end, who made a feint of thrusting the spike at him : that must have come from farther still. The man, brown, grit-covered, had a brown cigarette hanging from his mouth. That was in the days before he had consciously memorised. An emotion of the moment, a childish terror, perhaps, that he was truly about to be prodded with the bullock pole, had registered it. The dusky interior of a shed by a wharf, planks of heavy mote-stippled sun-glow leaning from its skylight to its floor, rows of them, and a monstrous man, with a moustache like walrus tusks, holding a thin sheaf of the spears of pampas grass in hand—that was another.

What a lonely life in a way, and yet how, in the loneliness, blessed. It was good to have seen. And he had loved a few people, meeting them on their journey, loved them and remembered them. Outside the hens would croon and cluck ; there would be breakfast odours ; he would hear Mary singing happily to herself below. Time to rise.

Time to go he thought it was at the end of four weeks.

“ What’s the hurry, man ? ” asked Ian.

But Robert said he could not stay for ever, though he’d like to. Letters had followed him and among them were two inquiries regarding when he would begin upon promised work. The divorce had brought his name still more before the public, though Smithson, writing to him of increased demand for his etchings and the increased prices, was not so crass as to give that explanation. “ Anything you can let me have—let me have it,” he wrote. Here was a change from the days of being informed, over his posters for the “ Stirring New Serial Beginning This Week,” what the public wanted and must have if he were to have his wages.

Yes, he'd better be going. Hard to go. It had all been good. But he would come back.

He'd remember the evenings with Mary, not to be beaten by her "rheumatisms," darning or sewing and Ian recounting some whimsical story of the island, gravely telling it, only a twinkle in his eyes, and then laughter ringing in the room, so that the dogs looked up and wagged their tails, knowing the meaning of the sound.

"Tell him about . . ." Mary would prompt, and there would be another story.

Once or twice neighbours looked in and there was a supper one night at the home of the man Angus (Angus MacCallum) who had driven Robert over from Dulse. Because of "company," Mrs. MacCallum had thought there should be grace before meat and had asked a venerable relative present to say it. His face was a study. He glared at her, then bowed his head and tried to cover his ignorance of one by making low muttering and chirping sounds (obviously neither Gaelic nor English) that deluded no one. The length that a grace should be troubled him. He chirped on too long. They all opened their eyes and looked at him, began to think there was something wrong with him and then his wife, by his side, nudged him.

"Amen," he said.

After they were home and abed Robert heard laughter from Ian's quarters and knew what he laughed at, recalling, and dared not laugh over at the time.

On the day he left them Ian was going to walk down with him to the smiddy. He would say good-bye to John Reid and the carrier would pick him up there. He did not want to go. There was a sickness round his heart that morning such as the first day of every new term at Carruthers' Academy used to create.

"I canna eat," said Mary to no one in particular.

Robert looked round the low-ceilinged room. His gaze searched the place. It had been a very happy

home to him. Laughter had rung in that room often on this visit. He saw the sunlight on the broad eastward window-sills. He loved the duskiness of time on the stained beams.

Andrew Coats, the orra-man, on that visit, pushed his plate from him and, without filling his pipe, went out with more than his usual agility. He generally walked across the floor as though trudging in deep loam or between turned sods behind a plough. He went almost hurriedly for him, and returned carrying a stag's horn which he had left, on coming in for breakfast, lying outside.

"I brought this," said he awkwardly. "I found it a while back and have had it over the fire-place in my wee hoose. Ye might like to have it."

He handed it over with his left hand, rubbed his right on his hip, then held it out.

"I ha'e to go up on the moor now for a load of divots," he said. "I'll say good-bye and wish you luck on your travel."

"Thank you, and good-luck to you. I'll prize this."

"It's nothing. But folks like whiles to take away something for a remembrancer."

He clumped off. Robert took up the bag and Ian the canvases.

"I'll come and see ye off," said Mary. "I'll come to the yard-end."

It was near the yard-end that Ian suddenly stopped.

"My stick!" he exclaimed. "I'd be forgetting my head if it wasna fixed on. I need the auld stick now for getting up the hill again," and away he went indoors.

Mary and Robert were alone. This was where she had called, ages ago, ages ago, to Mrs. MacCulloch that she was watching for Ian's return. ("And where's Rab?"—"Hoo should I ken?"). Ian was across the yard and indoors. She was looking up at Robert and he down at her, she with her head back as though offering herself for that long gaze of parting.

In an impulse he took her face in both hands. Down in those two dark pools of her eyes he had seen her. There was a traveller there ; there was somebody at home, very surely, a dear, dear somebody. He held her face in his hands, stooped, and very tenderly kissed her.

A long kiss. And then he raised his head. Mary had not expected that, though perhaps wishing it. All it implied, in its tenderness, she was just comprehending when it was over ; and as he drew back she gave a smacking kiss in air, a smacking, frank kiss.

Ian came from the house, stick hanging on arm.

"Take care of yourself, my dear," said Robert to Mary.

"I will. And good-luck to ye, Rab."

He wheeled away in step with Mr. MacCulloch. They trudged past the duck-pond and then down into the lane between the high wild rose and hawthorn hedges. Mary did not throw her apron over her face in wild regret this time. She stood there, chin on breast, watching him go, her hands linked before her, the fingers twisting, smiling and with tears in her eyes, happy and sad—very happy, a little sad. Just as he came to the beginning of the slope of the road Robert half-turned, slowly raised a hand to her, and slowly she raised a hand in response.

The two men tramped down without a word, in step. Ian was taller by inches. He glanced down at Robert's face, then looked ahead again, heaving a sigh. Arrived at the smithy Ian at once prepared to go, set down the package of canvases which he had carried, and—

"Now, we'll have no farewells," said he. "We'll meet again, I have no doubt. I'll just say so-long, Rab. Forget all your troubles and begin afresh."

The troubles had only once been mentioned, knowledge of them hinted at, and that inadvertently.

"So-long, Mr. MacCulloch."

It had never varied from that all the time : Mr. MacCulloch, his master at the farm. He could not,

somehow, call him *MacCulloch* as he said *Jardine*, or *Wilton*, or even *Broughton* ; and he could not say *Ian*.

The gaunt and ageing shepherd crushed Robert's knuckles together in his sinewy hand and tramped away with an urgent frou-frou among the old chestnut leaves by the door.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ROBERT was back in the same hotel in Glasgow and, by a pleasant coincidence, in the same room he'd had before. The parcel of canvases was propped against a wall and on the baggage-stand was his suit-case with the stag's horn tied to it by a stout string that John Reid had rummaged from a drawer full of bolts and nuts and odd nails and candle-ends, under a strained shelf before the murky smiddy window. That string was as much a souvenir as the stag's horn. How far away, here, the island air, the island purple, and its colour.

Robert was full of plans for the future. He would paint what and whom he wanted to paint. Ian MacCulloch and Harrison Jardine : they were often in his mind together. He thought they would get on well. What good friends he had, he considered, and how different, and yet all with something in common that explained how they were his friends. The shepherd, the blacksmith, the art-critic who had been in the diplomatic service—yes, he thought they would get on together. They belonged to the same country—Rathay not its name—to the same city, not London, not Glasgow. They would probably know each other if they met. So he thought.

He sat down at the window table and wrote a long letter to old Mrs. Cameron who had been much in his mind these last days. That done he set out to find the Raeburn School in its new quarters. Looking at the calendar to verify the date of his letter he had been

jogged to that visit, Broughton having told him that the emeritus chief usually visited at each month's end. And here was the thirty-first.

"Mr. Raeburn is in one of the class-rooms," he was told. "Would you like to send in your card?"

"No, thank you. Don't disturb him. I'll wait."

Just then Fra appeared, sweeping off-stage at one of the doors that gave on the hallway.

"Well, well, Robert! I'd have known you even if Mattio had not told me of your visit to my place with the Broughtons, so that I'd a notion I'd see you some day soon." The black eyes searched him. "And how are we? Started your fourth period Yet?"

His old master had a different notation for his progress from that of Jardine in his monograph.

"Oh, I want to talk to you," said Robert. "But first I must hear your news."

"Mine? I'm a survival. I'm at my journey's end here, pottering till the chariot draweth near. You are more interesting. Is Broughton going to have his way?"

"His way?"

"Yes. Keep you here to do what he says you came into this world to do—make a gallery of Scots portraits of the people? It's the people, it's humanity, you love. But we'll continue this elsewhere. Where's my hat?"

The janitor handed it to him.

"Where are you putting up?" asked Raeburn.

Robert told him.

"Splendid! So am I," said Raeburn, and they passed out into the street, his coat-tails swinging wide. "Yes," he said, "the people. That's your job. And affection, not contempt, is your best venture. I've always felt that Helen of the Factories was the vein—love, pity, a sense of passing beauty. What have you been doing in the Isle of Rathay?"

"I have them. You'll see them."

In the bedroom he produced them and that private

view recalled to him the day he waited to hear his fate in the room to left of the entrance at the School's old quarters. He began with the charcoal studies of Ian that he had made preparatory to final etchings. Raeburn did not take this package and shuffle its contents through. One by one Robert put the studies of Ian on the mantelshelf, and then the chalk drawings of Mary, Raeburn saying nothing but : " Stick up another. All right. Another. All right."

" That's the lot," said Robert.

" Um ! " said Raeburn, and Robert had not the uncertainty on this occasion that had troubled him on a former one regarding Fra's pleasure. " And now the canvases, please, that I see you have up your sleeve."

Robert set them up in a row in front of the drawings. Raeburn was sitting astride a chair, arms folded on its back.

" Well, this is the fourth period," he passed sufficient verdict. " What are you going to do now ? "

" I've had letters from two people I've promised to paint. I don't want to, but I'd better fulfil even half-promises."

" If you don't want to, and they are only half-promises, call them off."

" And there are things in London that I have to clear up. My studio there is——"

There was a tap at the door.

" Come ! " called Robert.

It was Broughton.

" Hullo, Raeburn. Hullo, Bobby. I dropped in at the school for you, Fra, and they told me you had left. I guessed you——"

He stopped in the midst of unnecessary explanations. He was looking at the portrait of Ian. He sat down on the edge of the bed and made a declaration :

" I have said—I have said it more than once—that I don't care a damn who does a thing so long as it is done. Perhaps I have fooled myself in saying I am never

jealous. Some people are proud of not being precisely what they are. But, oh, Bob, I'm sick with jealousy now. I wish I could have done that."

" You could do——" began Robert.

" No, I couldn't," Broughton interrupted. " That's Ian MacCulloch of Pebble Glen, but it's more than that. I don't know what your private title for it is but I call it: ' My kingdom is not of this world.' You got that about him. You've got the essential man."

" I've no sub-title. I just call it *The Shepherd*."

" Well, there you are, you see—not only Ian MacCulloch but *The Shepherd*. You have the same feeling about him as I. You've got to do more. Stay here. Do more. Your country needs you."

" He's going to London," said Raeburn.

" I don't want to go," said Robert definitely. " I feel as if I'd come home. It is as if I'd taken a long journey and got back to where I was—with all I've learnt in the interim."

" With all you've learnt in between," said Raeburn. " That's right. These early things had the promise of that. Well, when will you get finished down there and be with us again ? "

" If nothing intervenes," answered Robert, " a couple of months, I should say."

After that *if nothing intervenes* something happened. A man like George Hatrick would say it did not happen, that they imagined it. Or he would say that the mere words gave them a moment's dread lest something calamitous intervened just at the time when he was, by the signs, making another stride. But what they felt was more than that—more than a trouble due to his words. It was not only that they were quiet. A quiet of the kind called palpable was round them. The ambient air was quietness. It was as if the window had been closed. Did it swing shut and then open again ? No. There was no sudden single eddy of wind responsible.

The tense moment passed. All was normal again, rational. But they knew that they would remember that moment, that moment of hush interposed between them and the noises and cries of the street below.

There was no sense of supernatural—that was thrust aside, if not forgotten—as they went down to dinner. Fra took command, very grand, stumping along, standing back from the lift to wave them in before him. To him, not only because of his obvious seniority but because of his possessive manner, the head-waiter advanced with a bow and then, so grand the manner, asked if a special table had been reserved. Fra's expansiveness was so markedly evident that the head-waiter anxiously fluttered a hand for immediate attention of the table-waiter, beckoned to the wine-waiter. It was thus with an attendant at the back of each chair they sat down. Fra Raeburn was all puffed up. A pupil of his had done these things. He was going to have a good dinner and a good wine with it.

"Look here, Fra," objected Broughton, "what's all this swank about? You didn't paint that shepherd any more than I did."

"No, but I believed he would some day."

"Well, so did I, said Broughton.

Robert looked from one to the other and the waiters behind the chairs beamed beneficently, realising that something felicitous, whatever it was, had been achieved.

"You'll be spoiling me," said Robert. "I can't tell you what it means, sir"—he turned to Raeburn—"that you think I've done——"

"Oh, you can do with a little spoiling I expect," interrupted Raeburn. "Chianti," he said to the wine-waiter. "I think we'll have a flask of Chianti if these men agree. It is a simple taste but it is associated for me with some of my happiest days in Italy and this is my dinner."

Robert inclined his head, but Broughton said : " Gi'e me a gless o' whusky."

Staring at the menu-card Robert remembered again the day, after his first return from the Isle of Rathay, his trepidation in that room to left of the entrance of the old Raeburn School, with Sam lounging in a big chair clutching his hooked pipe and he gazing at the recorded beauty of a veined foot and a cupped hand. He remembered Raeburn carrying an easel to put in place for him, his manner grand, not arrogant, and thought of the old refrain : " I'm not here to put art into you but to bring it out of you," sometimes with a variant after " put art into you " of " only *le bon Dieu* can do that," and after " bring it out of you "—" if you have it in you." Yet, despite that asseveration, what a lot he owed this man. What a lot he owed Broughton too. He was very happy, sitting there. He would like, he thought, staring at the menu-card, for the sake simply of the belief of these friends in him to go on.

" What are you thinking ? " asked Fra Raeburn.

" The obvious. Whether he'll have thick or clear," replied Broughton for him before Robert could speak.

Raeburn shook his head.

" We do that sort of thing on the side," he said, " think whether we'll have thick or clear."

" About life. About everything," answered Robert. " Including soup," he added with a laugh, and gave his order to the waiter.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A MAN pushing a barrow past the station chanted : " Fine ceevil oranges ! Fine ceevil oranges ! " That did not puzzle Robert now as it would have done when, close on thirty years earlier, he first heard the street cries of the city. He knew that the civility of the oranges was not the point. Seville.

He thought of Spain. The transition thence to Peru was obvious. Thinking of Serena, and how curious a journey he had come, he strolled to and fro in the station entrance-hall. Outside a thin glutinous layer of grime was on the pavements, for it was a morning of drizzle. Beauty and colour were the answer to that. The spirit demanded them. Lacking beauty, to find it or create it ; seeing beauty, to love it or record it. That to him was a preoccupation, a grand passion. Art was a necessity. Art was life.

The newspaper-selling gamins called huskily the names of their papers. Their northern gaiety in face of dampness and poverty he caught in one of these cries : “ Break your *nEcho* ! ” Rents in the seats of trousers, elbows out at sleeves, and “ Break your *nEcho* ! ” Grit they had, he considered, not only the tangible grit, evident though that was, but the other.

He was going south by the forenoon train for Broughton had said that one should remember Galloway as well as the Trossachs, the Isle of Rathay, and Skye. The borders were rich with their own beauty. He’d have a glimpse at least of the borders, going by day. He strolled through the booking-hall and glanced at the clock. He had arrived with ample time to spare.

As he turned he saw Raeburn billowing into the station as if he were going to sing or recite there, looking round grandly, tossing the cape of his Inverness cloak over a shoulder. He espied Robert.

“ Ah-ha, there you are ! ”

A hansom jingled to a stop outside and Broughton leapt up in it like a jack in the box, slapped down his payment on the roof in front of the driver as though it were the paying counter, and swung down.

“ Well, here we are, here we are ! ” he said. “ How are we ? ”

Broughton and Fra had no difficulty in being allowed to pass the barriers with Robert. Broughton crossed the ticket collector’s palm with silver and Fra, by his

important air, went through free of toll. He looked, in fact, as if he owned the railway—genially.

A whistle blew. The train opposite glided deliberately away, a smoky radiance through the glass roof slipping along its varnished sides. After it had gone they saw just the sooty wall with its advertisements: a Steinlen poster, of milk; a merry yellow one, of mustard; one that brought from Broughton a rumble of: "Great fellow, the Beggarstaff Brothers."

"Which of you gentlemen is going in this carriage?" It was the guard making inquiry.

"I," said Robert.

"Well, step in, sir."

"I won't say good-bye," said Broughton. "Good-luck. Haste ye back."

Fra held up his hand, palm spread.

"Good-luck," said he. "Fourth period, my boy."

At once the train picked up speed and glided smoothly out. The two men went marching along the platform, Raeburn with his cape flying like wings and Broughton trailing smoke over his shoulder.

There was no one else in the compartment. To reserve a seat had evidently, this day, not been necessary. Robert sat there watching the suburbs glide past, and then the fields, and twiggy woods like smoke with an undulation of rooks over them. He was immensely happy. He was happy in the easy, swift motion of the train and the travel-rhythm of the wheels.

Going back now, just to clear up, pack, dismantle the studio, he recalled the days after his visit to Mary Cynthia in Paris. He had been as an automaton, doing what the lawyers told him to do, having lunch with them and obeying them in a business-like way. It was all cut and dried, like being presented at court. The law demanded certain processes and he complied without any desire to amend the laws regarding his case. He had wandered out of his own world into another from which, its mandates in such matters adhered to,

complied with, he would return whence, turning aside, he had come.

All that, it seemed, was now long past, and he was amazed to find that he was glad he was not going back to Cynthia. The infatuation was doused and he was not moved to any inexact and maudlin comment to the refrain "Love dies." That would have been a lying epitaph upon the experience. At the hotel in Paris, meeting her, he had been greatly and variously moved. It had been a vast relief to him that they had parted as friends. That had satisfied him then. And now—now he despised himself, called himself superficial, called himself insincere because of his new attitude to it all. He hoped that she would not ever feel the need to call on him as a friend. In fact he was not sure but that he hoped he would not ever have to see her again. He had to admit the truth to himself, whether creditable or not. But no doubt she was happier too, infinitely happier. She was in her own set. *Friends?* If they met again it would be *acquaintances*, he thought. Thank God, he considered, that he did not feel that way with everybody he had cared for.

Beyond the city the sun shone through. The past was over. Its records in the archives of memory could become dusty. He was beginning afresh as on that day on which he did not trouble to attend the breaking up ceremonies of school but just marched out of the Academy playground, the tramping of those who stayed receding up the stairs, marched out and went down to the docks and was rewarded with a spear of pampas grass.

"Will you be taking lunch, sir?"

He looked up. A dining-car attendant stood in the aisle.

"Yes."

"Thank you, sir. I'll be back again when it's ready."

Robert looked out of the window, thinking. If asked,

“Where are you going to?” the answer would be, “London,” with a feeling in a pocket for the ticket. London! Oh, he was going farther than London; and it was all miracle and wonder, even this speeding train. Where were they all going to? It might be the “Dear City of Zeus,” or the whole story might be in “I that wore a mitre am now a little heap of dust.” Whichever way, it was all fascinating, interesting always, often ecstasy, and sometimes a little sad because of not knowing.

The train ran into rain, lances of it, an etching of silver lines, aslant, across a gray-gold land backed by inky blues and purples of farther hills that merged with clouds, of clouds that merged with hills. Storm and cold rain outside and seclusion and comfort within: he recalled suddenly (astounded at all that was miraculously stored in him somewhere) a port-hole with a disc of glass in it holding away the Atlantic from his berth, and sitting up and watching the translucent green and the terrific darkening purple in delight and trepidation. Glass marbles with their mysterious inner whorls of colour were less wonderful then. He remembered looking out of the barn-door at the fish-carrier in the Sound, its scuppers foaming, and under down-beaten steam no more than valiantly holding its own against wind and tide, battling in one place, propeller whirling, then, at the turn of the tide—given half a chance, as it were—bowing on again. He remembered other rain: sheets of it in a red-bricked patio, so great a deluge that when the brown old cook came from the kitchen she caught up her skirts and ran wading to the next door. He was on a balcony, blowing bubbles. Across more than thirty years he remembered those soap-bubbles, the colours in them, the miniatures of the house and its windows in them. His mother had told him to keep quiet there so as not to trouble papa. Papa would be angry if he ran noisily through the house.

Chin in hand, elbow on the narrow sill, he listened and

was lost in reveries. He remembered that house and the cheese-dish on the sideboard and how, when he ran through the rooms, he used sometimes to pause before it, marking time to give the effect of still running, while he lifted the lid and stole a piece of cheese, then ran on.

“That was a long time ago,” he thought.

He remembered other rain, on the skylight of an upper room in a tall tenement, a sudden blatter of it in a driving gale that frightened Helen of the Factories and made him think of how, in the dark, it would be lashing on Rathay Fell. Did he regret that? Did he cherish a memory of her face, her voice (“. . . most folks want to be doing something else than putting the tops on marmalade jars, on and on.”), her low, husky singing? He regretted it—and he cherished her memory.

He thought then of his parting from Mary of the Glen—a “big lump” no longer—and that smacking kiss of hers in air as he stood erect from kissing her farewell. A tender memory. He thought of his fifty-pounds-a-year period in Glasgow, its longings for so much, possession of so little—of material things, that is. But material things were not all by any means.

“No, not by any means,” he spoke aloud.

He took off his hat and dropped it on the seat beside him. His chin was perhaps even more definitely taut when he had been a boy, but in his eyes was still that look of inquiry, of wonder when he was not, with furrowed brows, keenly seeking to seize the lines and colours of things and people seen. Above all they were the eyes of a dreamer.

He had known, often, two lives: one, by common consent, called the real and the other called the dream, though the dream had seemed to him usually the more important. The more important. He thought of Raeburn. Perhaps it was true what Broughton said—that Raeburn was not a great painter, though certainly a great teacher. What Fra said had a way of sticking-in

his mind, inspiring ; that last remark of his, for example : "Fourth period, my boy ! "

"That fellow should be coming along soon to say that lunch is ready," he thought in an aside.

The brakes suddenly jammed on. There was a long scream of wheels sliding instead of rolling on rails. There was a thud, a rending, and a blow. . . .

The doctors who had been hurried to the scene of the wreck told the newspaper-men that Robert Barclay must have been killed instantly.

There are those who, be a plan partially seen or invisible, will think that was the end, sheep to be mutton, men to be mummies at best. There are others who, be a plan partially seen or invisible, will think it possible, or even probable, that he had passed on to his next period. In lack of present final evidence one way or the other, our main consideration may be one of gratitude for the gifts of beauty that he left behind.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

BY FREDERICK NIVEN

Some Critical Estimates

It is impossible to read Mr. Niven's *A Tale That Is Told* without saying to oneself, "But this is a Scottish Tchekhov." Mr. Niven has long been known to the discerning as one of the dozen novelists writing in English whose works are of the slightest importance to persons given to novel reading but in full possession of their faculties . . . His gift (although he has written some excellent adventure stories) has always been for character, and in particular for Scottish character, and here it flowers to something like perfection in an amazing duplex study of the narrator of *A Tale That Is Told* and the family he describes. Harold Grey, the narrator, is just such a man as Tchekhov loved to describe—delicate and powerless, noble and futile, and finding a mystic contentment in his defeated life. Tchekhov might have written that scene where he sits, looking out at the snow with the girl he loves. . . . As wonderful is the picture of the magnificent old humbug, the Reverend Thomas Grey. Into this portrait is somehow compressed the essence of half-Scottish life, the contradicting half with which no novelist has dealt. Barrie has dealt with its sentimentality, George Douglas with its brutality, but no one before Mr. Niven has ever dealt with its grey floridity, its pulpit theatricality, its extravagances that break out in the very places that one would have thought were committed to primness—**REBECCA WEST** in *The New Statesman*.

This is a quiet, unobtrusive, almost casual story, memorable in its creation of character. When are people going to wake up and discover that in Niven we have one of the finest novelists alive? It is indeed remarkable that the author of *Justice of the Peace*, *A Wilderness of Monkeys*, *Ellen Adair*, and now this book, can continue unsung. Of course, the day will come. But it is stupid that it should be so long delayed.
—**HUGH WALPOLE** in *Vanity Fair*.

This is a book! I am deeply grateful to you for that book. It picked me up and played with me as it chose. It is one of the few books that is more real than a book; it is an experience.
—**HULBERT FOOTNER** in *New York Evening Post*.

A book so quietly powerful that not nearly enough people noticed it.—**CHRISTOPHER MORLEY** in *New York Evening Post*.

A Tale That is Told has the mellow autumn beauty that at times reminds one of Gissing's *Henry Ryecroft* in its tone . . . The vigorous portrait of the Rev. Thomas Grey, D.D., is

Some Critical Estimates

worthy in its humour and truth of a place beside the old men in Stevenson's portrait gallery. Dr. Grey, though just on the safe side of humbug, is lovable in every inch of him. And if the other folks, his children, and his wife with the alabaster effect, are less striking, it is simply because they are in themselves among the crowd of more shadowy characters who actually make up the vast majority of the human race. There is a sorrowful truth in this story of the generations that pass, of the benediction their dignity even communicates to old walls and gardens, which makes one think better of all life since it can produce anything so pleasant. Mr. Niven amply justifies his existence as a novelist, for he possesses humour, insight, and a gift of form in construction which is quite delightful in days when the "slice of life" is apt to be but raggedly hacked off the romance writer's loaf.—**M. P. WILLCOCKS** in *The Bookman*.

Mr. Niven in his exceedingly quiet way is a builder of men. . . . There are few people one would rather have as friend than Harold Grey. He is gentleman incarnate—a hard thing to draw; and it is an immense tribute to this author that we feel him to be actually in his little shop of rare editions, hidden in some quiet street.—*Observer*.

In the manner of its telling, *A Tale That is Told* suggests somewhat the art of the etcher. Mr. Niven employs the pen as an artist the burin, with as scrupulous a regard for economy of detail, and his sentences are as incisive and as pregnant of meaning as perfectly bitten lines. Marjorie is perhaps the most brilliant example of Mr. Niven's manner and power in characterisation. One has again resort to the artistic simile. Marjorie is not painted full length. She is etched, and in few words Mr. Niven gives her form, vital as a line portrait by Zorn. *A Tale That is Told* is far above the ordinary novel and affords further evidence that Mr. Niven is a writer gifted with unusual sentiveness, sympathy and power of observation.

—*Glasgow Herald*.

Full of charm . . . A beautiful and moving story.—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

There are sound lasting qualities in *A Tale That is Told*. It is the most pleasant long work of fiction that has been written about us for a generation and no Glasgow reader should overlook it.—*Glasgow Evening News*.

An engrossing story.—*Daily News*.

A book to be read and laid down and read again with pleasure.—*Morning Post*.

NEW 7/6 FICTION

J. D. Beresford

Author of *Real People*, etc.

LOVE'S ILLUSION

THE story of a young man's first and completely absorbing love for a girl five years younger than himself; a love that found full satisfaction before it was suddenly and devastatingly shattered. The period is 1899, but we are given a sight of the hero, thirty years later, still cherishing the memory of that first adoring passion of his as a symbol of the perfect idyll. There are other vital characters involved in the story, more especially that of the adored one's mother, a still attractive woman in the later thirties, whose own love-affairs are the scandal of the neighbourhood, and that of a very remarkable old lady of seventy, also the slave of her vanity, though it works in her to different ends.

E. Wynne-Tyson

Author of *Melody*, etc.

INCENSE AND SWEET CANE

“HE had criminally refused to consider the woman he had made his wife in the capacity of mother to his child.” That, in a nut-shell, is the story of Mrs. Wynne-Tyson's new novel; but it is more than an exposition of one of the greatest social problems of these post-war days. Mercia is a delightful portrait of a child, and in her are both the sunshine and the shadow of the novel. Clive Brade, her father, has married a beautiful but superficial woman, a pleasure-seeker who has no spark of mother-love in her being—an all too common modern type. Tragedy is inevitable. Clive is torn between love for his child and love for Betty. He makes a fatal choice, and only realises the terrible meaning of all he has come through after an almost unbearable mental struggle.

NEW 7/6 FICTION

May Edginton

Author of *Fair Lady*, *Life isn't so bad*, etc.

CALL HER FANNIE

FRANCES, a very pretty girl with brains and vitality, was the daughter of Tom Baxter, an unsuccessful business man in the little English town of Fairwater. She had just managed to get to Oxford and was completing her course when she suddenly found herself the possessor of a few hundred pounds. What was she to do? Her father and brother expected her to spend it for the betterment of her family, but she decided to take a year's trip to the United States, a decision with which her mother was in complete agreement. Miss Edginton describes Frances's adventures on the other side of the Atlantic and in Paris on her return to Europe with a really graphic pen, and we follow her loves and rivalries with ever-increasing interest.

Florence Kilpatrick

Author of *Hetty's Son*, etc.

RIFT VALLEY

MICHAEL LORIMER is going out to Africa with no special prospects—anywhere to be away from the unappreciative literary public of London and of his home country, Ireland. He forms a friendship with Justin Ferraby, going the same way, in search of health. Ferraby is unable to stand the voyage and dies at sea, but not before he has made Lorimer promise to take his place, go to Kinankop as Justin Ferraby and take up a job with Hugh Sheridan, his farmer uncle, who is expecting but has never seen his dissipated nephew. Lorimer begins to realise the difficulties of his position. The deception rankles, but he decides to go through with it, not a little on the strength of a photograph of Ferraby's cousin Gloria!

